University of Alberta

Constructing meaning from text through social interaction: An interpretive case study of English language learners

by

Joyce Lynn Purdy

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Elementary Education

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall, 2008

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Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-46405-2
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-46405-2

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to inquire into the role that oral discourse plays during reading events for the language development and literacy of English language learners (ELLs). Vygotsky's social constructivist theory provided the theoretical framework to explore how social surroundings influence the construction of meaning for primary students who are English language learners. My research question was, "How do ELL students use oral language to shape and extend their construction of meaning while participating in reading activities in a primary classroom?"

This interpretive case study focused on three English language learners who spoke a language other than English at home. The study was conducted in their Grade 3 classroom in an inner city school in Western Canada for two months in 2006. Data collection consisted of contextual field notes, interviews, and participant observation and tape recording of the three students participating and interacting in guided reading events.

The findings suggest that language and literacy development is strengthened through a positive teacher-student relationship in addition to three components of language education: a focus on meaning, a focus on vocabulary and a focus on use. Consideration of students' background knowledge, intentional vocabulary instruction, and opportunities to use language were important to the language development and literacy of these English language learners. Furthermore, the results of this study suggest that cultural understandings vary from student to student, and validation of students' cultural knowledge is an important aspect of the ability and willingness to participate in the guided reading discussions. This study also revealed that the structured format of

guided reading may constrain student interaction and collaborative talk, thus limiting possibilities for language development and literacy growth.

Research that takes place in the classroom sheds light on the complexity and messiness of classroom discourse; such research promotes understanding of contexts that support success for all students, but especially for English language learners. This study reveals how knowledge is constructed against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices and language. Insights gained from this study will be helpful for teacher-educators, teachers, researchers and policy makers to enrich literacy practices with ELL students.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the many people who have played a part in helping me to complete this journey. I would first like to thank Jill McClay who encouraged me to begin doctoral studies. She has not only been a patient mentor throughout this process, she has also become a good friend. Thank you, Jill, for the opportunities you gave me to be a part of your research, as well as your advice and suggestions while I was completing my research. I also treasure the many conversations we had, both personal and professional.

I would also like to thank Carol Leroy, whose divergent thinking and thought-provoking questions led me to new ways of thinking. Her constant positive attitude kept me believing in myself.

Thank you Angela Ward for your thoughtful comments and insights. When I read your book, *Classroom conversations,* I knew the right person had been chosen as my external examiner. We share the same passion for the importance of oral language in the classroom. To the other people on my committee, Margaret Mackey, Joyce Bainbridge, and Marg Iveson, thank you for your support and interest in my research.

Thank you, also, to "Wynn" for allowing me access to your grade three classroom. Without your invitation and consent, this research would not have been possible. I also wish to thank Kenton, Todd and Tatiana for allowing me to watch you and tape record you. I wish the best for you in your future.

There are many fellow graduate students I wish to acknowledge, who, without their support, advice, encouragement and socializing, this project would not have been as interesting or as meaningful: Joan Chambers, Kathy Smith, Sheron Burns, Julie Long, Shelley Griffin, Jean Reston, Leonora Macy, Darcey Dachyshyn, and Teddy Moline. I would especially like to thank Young-a Lee, a teacher of English from Korea, whom I met while doing doctoral studies. We shared the same research interests, and I thank you for the many conversations we had. I valued your insights and your friendship.

There are many friends, members of my family, and colleagues to thank, too numerous to mention, who periodically asked me about my progress, and by asking, encouraged me to continue. Thank you to all of you! Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my three sons, Tore, Ray and Danny, for their willingness to listen to my ups and downs, and who always appeared impressed when I showed them the document in progress. You have been an inspiration to me, with all of the hard work that I see you apply to your studies.

I would also like to express my gratitude for the financial support provided by the University of Alberta Recruitment Scholarship, the Dr. Marie Meyer Memorial Research Grant, and the Queen Elizabeth II Graduate Scholarship.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

For as long as I can remember, I have been intrigued with the processes of learning to talk, read, and write. My focus area during my undergraduate years was the teaching of reading and I immersed myself in courses about this process. I taught school during the late '70s and early '80s when teaching very much reflected a transmission model; we had workbooks for spelling, phonics, and reading.

In the mid-'80s, I stayed home to have my children, twin boys, and then another son 22 months later. My own children were a source of wonder and intrigue to me as I watched them play with sounds, respond to verbal requests, and then eventually begin speaking themselves. It seemed to me that they didn't "miss a beat." They absorbed everything around them: the routines, talk and ways of doing things that would eventually shape who they would become and their view of the world. Talk, I had read, is of major importance to a preschooler's language development, and so I often carried on a running monologue of what we were doing on any particular day. We also read lots of books together and I was amazed at how still they sat when we read, their faces reflecting the magic of the story.

When the boys began school, I helped in their classrooms and a shock awaited me. I was bowled over by the changes that had occurred during the six years that I had been at home raising my boys. The primary division classrooms were abuzz with activity, noise, and interaction. One morning, especially, stays vivid in my mind. I was helping in my son's Grade 2 classroom while the students were in the middle of writing stories. Unlike classrooms I knew from the past, where students wrote quietly at their desks, these children were moving about the room, conversing with each other, conferencing with the teacher, or writing alone at their desks. Their papers were literally cut and pasted, scratched out, and revamped. It was the writing process approach in action, and I had never seen anything like it before. I went home that day exhausted, but with many questions about this approach to teach writing.

When my sons were in mid-elementary school, I decided to return to university to pursue a master's degree. My focus this time was on writing. I was introduced to Vygotsky (1934/1986) and how his theories now influenced the way classrooms were structured and organized. For my coursework and assignments, I was able to use writing samples from my boys and to interview them and their friends about their reading habits. I took an in-depth look at one son's writing from kindergarten to Grade 7 for my capping paper. After completing my master's degree in 2000, I went to work at an inner-city school.

The next three and a half years as a teacher in Grades 2 and 3 classrooms gave me a chance to incorporate what I had learned over the past few years, but more importantly, it taught me how to program for the whole child. Many of the children at this particular school faced extreme life challenges that I couldn't begin to fathom. Many families lived in poverty. In others, the adults struggled with finding a job while learning English as another language. At the same time that I was teaching in this school, I was taking a graduate course about language development, and I was required to tape record classroom discourse for an assignment. This experience made me aware of which students were talking in my classroom, and which were not. I noticed that the students whose home language was not English were especially quiet during whole group, small group, and even one-to-one situations.

Many additional situations mystified me while teaching Grades 2 and 3. I met regularly with groups of students in guided reading groups. "Guided reading" is when a teacher works with a small group of children who are at about the same reading level. The teacher supports each reader's development of effective reading strategies (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). There was a particular reading group of five children with whom I read, and three of these students were English language learners or ELL students. I use the term ELL, English language learner, rather than ESL, English as a second language, because immigrant children may be learning English as a third, or even fourth language. This term acknowledges the diversity of students and does not assume that English is the child's "second" language. English language learners are students "who first learned to

speak, read and/or write a language other than English" (Alberta Education, 2007, p. 1). I noticed that these children were reticent to discuss the books that we read together, even though they appeared to be reading when we read silently and they were able to read books at their grade level aloud fluently. Because these children would shrug rather than elaborate on what a passage meant to them, I wondered if they had understood what they had read. It was difficult for me to know what these students had understood if they were reluctant to speak. More importantly, how could these children develop language and literacy skills when they were not speaking? Children can deepen their thinking through verbalization (Cazden, 2001), and it appeared to me that these children were missing out on an opportunity to expand on their thinking. As a teacher, I was unsure of how I could provide such opportunities, and whether or not my view of their experience was correct. I also wondered if there were language constraints that led these children to understand only a portion of the text. I knew that in some cultures the custom is for the student to remain silent while the teacher talks.

Other classroom events piqued my curiosity. Another reading group struggled with reading; this group included only boys, two of whom were English language learners. What challenges were they facing as struggling readers who spoke English as another language? How could I help them? I had the opportunity to work with one of these ELL boys while taking a diagnostic reading course during my first year of coursework in the doctoral program. Through conversation and working with him one-to-one, I noticed that often his vocabulary and background knowledge affected his understanding. The ambiguity of English words and their meanings can be difficult even for a native speaker; how much more difficult would reading be for an ELL learner? We were reading nursery rhymes one day, and while reading "Little Bo Peep" this boy effectively decoded "Bo Peep." He then frowned at me and said, "Is that her name? Why is her name Bo Peep?" His question made me realize that I accepted the odd name because the nursery rhyme was part of my cultural background. This ELL learner saw the name from a different cultural stance than mine.

On another occasion, an ELL boy was working on a math sheet and a question read, "What is your age?" He looked to me and said, "What means 'What is your age?'" I did not understand his confusion with the meaning, but said, "It means... how old are you." "Oh! How *old* are you!" he brightened, suddenly understanding. Reflecting on this incident, I realized that "age" and "old" can have many meanings depending on the context. Age can mean that one is old, the process of getting old (aging), or, as in this case, what is your age? For children learning another language, words have meaning in the sentence, the situation, and the culture from which they come. Sorting out these meanings is a complex process. Therefore, as children progress through the grades, reading increasingly complex text must be a huge challenge unless opportunities are given for children to ask questions, voice their confusions and, through talk, develop thinking.

These questions were at the back of my mind when I returned to university to pursue doctoral studies in 2003. My studies could have gone in a myriad of directions; however, my preoccupation with the importance of talk to learning left an impression on me, especially for children learning in a language other than their home language. I decided to pursue my interest in English language learners in the elementary school.

A former colleague with whom I had taught was intrigued with my research question when I told her about my study. Her role in the school was to work with struggling readers in the upper grades, some of whom were ELL students. She, too, was perplexed with how best to help these students read and comprehend text. In a casual talk with her before my study began, she commented that ELL students appeared to have continuing difficulty with comprehension as they progressed through the grades. Students in the higher grades have different gaps in their learning, and these gaps are difficult to ascertain. I talked with her again while conducting my study, and she commented, "The thing with Division II kids that happens is that their area of difficulty, or the skills that they have are so varied, and the skills that they lack are so varied." In her experience working with ELL children, she noted that, "there's a lot of word calling, so they've really figured out sort of how to work with the language, but they don't really have the

depth of understanding." In other words, ELL students can be good decoders, and this can be misleading for the teacher. Her next comment was eerily similar to what I had experienced: "And so they sound much more fluent than they actually are, and it's easy to mistake their ability to read as their ability to understand." The situation becomes complex, she added, when students struggle with their abilities. One boy was reluctant to ask for help, "And he doesn't want to admit that he doesn't know...so it's really hard for him to ask for help when he needs help." I then asked her what she would recommend that teachers do who are working with younger ELL students. She paused, and then reiterated that the teacher should not be deceived by good oral reading, and that the teacher must ensure that ELL students have understood what they have read. She believed in the importance of conversation around text and added that ELL students also need to have the language to express their understandings. My thoughts were similar, but as we talked, we both expressed frustration at not knowing if we were on the right track, and if we were, how best could teachers foster the literacy growth of their ELL students?

Research Purpose and Questions

My teaching experience in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms led me to my research question. I was curious about the classroom reading experiences of young children who do not speak English as their first language. Particularly, I wondered how these children comprehend text in English while they are learning the language. I was also interested in the role that oral language plays in the language and literacy development of ELL students. The purpose of this study was to inquire into the role that oral discourse plays during reading events for the language development and literacy of English language learners. My primary question was: "How do ELL students use oral language to shape and extend their construction of meaning while participating in reading activities in a primary classroom?" I was interested in oral language and how it mediates children's learning. My related questions included: How do children construct understandings through their use of oral language with the teacher and with each other?

What contexts support ELL students' construction of meaning in print texts? Reading events would provide the social activity in which I was to observe group discourse.

Significance of the Study

Canadian classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse as the number of immigrant children increases. There have been 1.2 million immigrants arrive in Canada between 2001 and 2006, boosting Canada's population by 5.4% since the 2001 census (*Edmonton Journal*, 2007). Many of these people speak a language other than English as their first language. Teachers in urban centers, especially, are faced with the task of meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Although the literacy level of Canadians in general is high, linguistic minorities face serious challenges in achieving high literacy proficiency. Duff (2001) notes that high school drop out rates tend to be higher among immigrant students due to frustration and failure at school. Schools play a critical role in providing opportunities for students; therefore, educators must ensure that diverse cultures and languages do not create barriers to educational success (New London Group, 1996).

The concept of "literacy" and what is meant by "being literate" has changed dramatically in recent years. Literacy encompasses much more than a technical skill to be learned, such as the basic skill of reading texts with minimal understanding, or writing that is comprehensible. Instead, literacy also includes:

> the ability to use language, content, and reasoning in ways that are appropriate for particular situations and disciplines. Students learn to 'read' the social meanings, the rules and structures, and the linguistic and cognitive routines to make things work in the real world of English language use. (Langer, 2002, p. 2)

Knobel (1999) echoes this view: "students need to learn ways of thinking analytically and critically about relationships among discourses, information, social practices and meaning-making" (p. 5). Literacy is a set of social practices and its definition depends on what people do with reading and writing in their respective communities (Meek, 1992; Street, 2001). Therefore, an understanding of literacy involves

an understanding of "the complex cultural and human roots that underlie thinking and learning" (Langer, 1987). Cazden (2001) states that classroom discourse is even more important now than it was when she wrote the first edition of *Classroom discourse* in 1988. This is due, in part, to the complexity of what counts as knowledge, learning, and literacy. She looked at "situated language use" in school and questioned how patterns of language use affect what counts as knowledge, student learning, equality and inequality, and lastly what communicative competence such patterns promote. Patterns of language use are still of concern today given our increasingly multicultural classrooms; the need to understand and to communicate effectively with all students is vital. Cazden (2001) notes that curriculum standards have changed to include problem solving, processes instead of products, and higher level thinking skills. Students are asked to be effective at oral and written communication and to have the ability to work in groups with diverse people.

Because literacy involves social activity and ways of thinking, rather than just a set of skills, the complex social relationship between ELL students and the culture of the mainstream classroom is of vital importance. As Street (2001) states: "the ways in which teachers and their students interact is already a social practice that affects the nature of the literacy being learned" (p. 8). Non-native speakers of English often score poorly on standardized tests and are at risk of academic failure. This failure is due to a possible number of factors: classrooms unwittingly devalue the home language and culture, there is limited use of the first language in the classroom, minority groups feel subordinated to the mainstream culture, minority students may prefer different forms of interaction that conflict with the ways of speaking in school, or there is a lack of literacy development in English, leading to poor reading and writing skills and consequent negative attitudes toward school (Au, 1998; Cummins, 2001; Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley, 2003).

Cummins (2006b) suggests that teachers are generally unaware of these issues because teacher-education programs and school systems continue to cater to the monolingual and monocultural, "generic" student. Canadian schools of the past catered to the predominantly white, mainstream student, whereas now educators must meet the needs of a diverse student body. He adds that, "Home languages other than English or

French are viewed as largely irrelevant to children's schooling. At best, they are treated with benign neglect and ignored; at worst educators consider them an obstacle to the acquisition of English or French, and discourage their use in school and at home" (Cummins, 2006b, p. 5).

With the shift toward constructivist approaches to teaching, more emphasis has been placed on discursive practices in classroom settings (Barnes & Todd, 1995) as well as research inquiries into those practices. As a result, there is a wealth of knowledge about the relationships between discourse, learning, and schooling (Hicks, 1996), but more information is needed about ELL students' oral language in classroom contexts. Research on ELL students has focused on oral input, and on how to speak oral English; there have been few studies pertaining to the unpredictable and sometimes chaotic interactions that take place in multilingual classrooms, nor how to teach these students to understand what they have read (Anderson & Roit, 1996; Duff, 2001; Toohey, 2000; Van den Branden, 2000). In addition, social interactions among adult ELL students have been studied (Fassler, 1998) but there is insufficient research about interactions in primary classrooms, with the exception of Toohey (2000) and Martinez-Roldan (2000), and very little evidence substantiating the effect of negotiation of meaning as an aid to comprehension of printed text for ELL students (Van den Branden, 2000). Lastly, there is little documented research about Canadian classroom contexts.

This study will contribute to the existing research about ELL students and their literacy learning in social contexts. More research is needed on the effect of language mediation strategies on literacy development (Olmedo, 2003; Toohey, 2000). My question is particularly important in that an examination of spoken language can be a powerful source of knowledge about social systems and learning (Rhymes, 2003; Toohey, 2000). I view language learning as culture-and-context specific. Classrooms are speech communities in themselves (Cazden, 2001), and children bring various and discrepant literacy abilities to school. To successfully communicate and learn in school, children must learn the classroom discourse, defined by Hicks (1996) as "language used socially" (p. 5). The nature of interactions between students, and between the teacher and

student is important for the academic success of multilingual students (Hinako, 2002); therefore, insights gained from this study, I believe, will open up possibilities to enrich our literacy practices with ELL students. This knowledge can be helpful for teacher-educators, teachers, curriculum specialists, and policy makers to better meet the needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse student population.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> All research is interpretive, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 13)

Theoretical Framework: Vygotsky

Constructivism fits well with my view of the world and my study because in this paradigm, knowledge is viewed as constructed rather than discovered. The constructivist paradigm asserts that: "Realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature...and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). The aim of inquiry in the constructivist paradigm is to understand the constructions that people hold, but as new information emerges, these constructions can undergo revision. The aim of my inquiry was to better understand human behaviour and experience, specifically reading events for young ELL students.

I developed this literacy research from a social constructivist perspective which posits that learning is a social activity, and that learners actively construct their own understandings. Hruby (2002) describes constructivism as a psychological description of knowledge whereby knowledge formation is in the mind. Social constructivist theory also pays attention to social scaffolds and frameworks and how social surroundings influence an individual's construction of meaning (Hruby, 2002). Vygotsky's (1934/1986) work, which integrated the psychological and the social, accords well with a social constructivist perspective. He also identified the role of language in development, and his work has contributed much to current educational practice. In this chapter, I will describe the theories of Vygotsky as they relate to language and reading, as well as instructional implications for English language learners.

Vygotsky (1934/1986) introduced a sociocultural and sociohistorical perspective to teaching and learning in his theory that language is a mediator of higher mental

processes. He proposed that we use psychological tools, or symbols, to extend our mental abilities. We use signs and symbols to communicate, and they reflect the culture and history that created them. Language is the most powerful symbolic tool of society, and it is through language that children become members of their cultural group. At a very early age, children begin to associate the symbols in their environment and culture with meaning; thus, cognition is culturally mediated (Vygotsky, 1934/1986).

Vygotsky's (1934/1986) view was radically different from existing theories which separated the person from the world. Instead of believing that knowledge was something "out there" to be discovered by the knower, he argued that knowledge is constructed through social interaction, and is influenced by one's history, culture, and language. His approach was more holistic than existing views at the time; Vygotsky described the complexity of learning and understanding as a socially situated activity. "The child's intellectual growth is contingent on his [sic] mastering the social means of thought, that is, language" (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, p. 94).

Much of Vygotsky's work focused on the interrelationship between thought and language. He proposed that children move from external dialogue to internal or inner speech. Higher mental functions, therefore, move from an interpersonal (social) plane, to an intrapersonal (internalized) plane. The shift from the interpersonal to the intrapersonal is an indicator of a child's learning and control over his or her own behavior (Hicks, 1996; Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Language is integral to the intrapsychological plane as well as the interpsychological plane. They represent what one is thinking, and they appear first between people and then inside the child.

The transition from the social to the internalized plane takes place in the zone of proximal development whereby an adult, or a more knowledgeable other, can help a child reach higher mental functions through mediated support. Vygotsky (1934/1986) defined the zone as the difference between the child's actual level of development and the level of performance that s/he achieves in collaboration with a more knowledgeable other, such as an adult or classmate. A child can perform a difficult task (one just beyond his/her level of ability) by either working with an adult, or in a collaborative peer group

situation, and eventually, the child will be able to complete the task on his/her own. Vygotsky aptly described the process thus, "What the child can do in cooperation today, he can do alone tomorrow" (p. 188). The speech mediating the activity is as significant as completing the task. The social interaction serves to direct, or mediate, the thinking process, and higher mental processes emerge as a result (Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Moll, 1990). The construction of higher mental functions lies outside of the individual, in psychological tools and interpersonal relations (Vygotsky, 1934/1986). "In our conception, the true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual" (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, p. 36). In other words, the social and the individual planes are interwoven; speech unites the cognitive and the social (Cazden, 2001).

Vygotsky's (1934/1986) discussion of word meanings and the development of concepts also bear significance on this study. He suggested that concepts fall into two different groups: spontaneous and scientific. Spontaneous concepts arise from a child's immediate, everyday experiences, and are unconscious and nonsystematic. In fact, a child is not conscious of his spontaneous concepts until long after he has acquired the concepts; he is not "conscious of his own act of thought" (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, p. 192). Scientific concepts, on the other hand, originate in the specialized and structured activity of the classroom; they "evolve under the conditions of systematic cooperation between the child and the teacher" (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, p. 148). A child's higher mental functions mature and develop as a result of this cooperation. Scientific concepts are formal and logical as well as abstract in nature. Vygotsky gives the example of the everyday concept of "brother," which a child acquires naturally through personal experience. However, when asked to define the concept of brother, the child may find the task abstract and difficult.

The conditions surrounding scientific and spontaneous concepts are vastly different, but the two are, nonetheless, related. "We believe that the two processes—the development of spontaneous and of nonspontaneous concepts--are related and constantly influence each other. They are parts of a single process: the development of concept

formation" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 157). Word meanings, for example, undergo a certain development. They begin with everyday or spontaneous understandings, and then deepen and develop with a child's intellectual development to abstract and hierarchical scientific concepts. In other words, spontaneous concepts move toward greater abstraction and the eventual development of scientific concepts.

As concepts develop they become interrelated with concepts already acquired. Scientific concepts grow as the teacher collaborates and assists the child and, as a result, a child's higher mental functions develop. As Vygotsky (1934/1986) states: "concepts do not lie in the child's mind like peas in a bag, without any bonds between them" (p. 197), suggesting that words and concepts are interrelated.

Sociocultural Theories, English Language Learners and Reading

Sociocultural theory and constructivist approaches are important considerations in promoting literacy achievement for children of diverse backgrounds (Au, 2002; Toohey, 2000), and can advance knowledge in the field of ELL instruction (Lantolf, 2000). Three overlapping themes, discussed in more detail below, are key to integrating sociocultural theory into practice for ELL students: 1) language learning is a developmental process mediated by classroom discourse; 2) the negotiation of meaning occurs socially in the zone of proximal development; and 3) language reflects the culture and history that created it (Au, 2002; Lantolf, 2000).

Oral language is an essential aspect of classroom life. Cazden (2001) points out three ways that communication is significant for learning. First, teachers use spoken language to teach, and children demonstrate what they have learned through spoken language. Second, classrooms are crowded, and the teacher is responsible for controlling the talk in the classroom. Third, the language children speak is an important aspect of their personal identity. For the English language learner, these features of communication take on significant dimensions. Not only is language development mediated through classroom discourse, but learning is also a form of language socialization between students and their teacher (Cummins, 2000; Lantolf, 2000). Classroom discourse is

complex, and the study of this communication system is valuable for anyone involved with teaching and learning. This is especially true for educators who work with English language learners.

Heath's (1983) ground-breaking work illustrated that the skills and discourse taught at school can be different than the discourse learned at home. She analyzed the acquisition of language and literacy as cultural practices that are socially situated and brought the complexity of language learning to the forefront. Heath compared language usage in three neighbouring communities in the Piedmont Carolinas: a white, working-class community, a black working-class community, and the townspeople, who were teachers in a class that Heath taught. Children from the working-class communities did not fare as well as their middle-class peers in school. Heath focused on the forms of discourse used in each community, and she realized that these children became members of their communities as a result of immersion in the language, behaviors, and activity of the world around them. Although all three communities engaged in rich literacy practices, she concluded that there was a discord between the literacy valued in the home culture and literacy valued and practiced in school. The implication of her work for this study is that language and literacy are human constructions, and that classroom discourse is highly complex. Children's understanding of the world is based on their life experiences and interactions with those around them, or members of their cultural group. An understanding of their social contexts is necessary to help students of diverse backgrounds. Teachers have a responsibility to understand their students' culture and background so that the literacy practices in school can promote success. Heath's work is particularly relevant today given that Canadian classrooms are comprised of children from cultural groups from all over the world, who speak many languages.

The notion that learning is socially mediated within the zone of proximal development, and is culturally laden, suggests that teachers, peers, and the dynamics of classroom interaction are important to literacy learning (Au, 1998). As Moll (1990) suggests: "For the theory of teaching, the zone of proximal development is the cornerstone. For the theory of schooling, activity settings are key" (p. 192). Classroom

discourse has potential for literacy development. For this reason language use should be studied, especially with the changing composition and added diversity of today's classrooms.

This study draws upon the significance of social interaction as a way to acquire meaning and reach deeper levels of understanding (Vygotsky, 1934/1986). Within this sociocultural framework are two interrelated theories which will be addressed in the literature review: the process of language acquisition and proficiency for the language learner based on the work of Cummins (2000, 2001), and reader response theory based on the work of Rosenblatt (1989, 1994). I first discuss acquisition of a second language.

Acquisition of a Second Language

The process of acquiring a second language is thought to be a combination of acquisition and learning (Gee, 1996). Acquisition of language happens in the natural setting, which is how we learn our native language; whereas learning is a conscious knowledge of something by breaking it down into its component parts. Gee (1996) suggests that learning comes after acquisition but that the two are not necessarily a dichotomy. Rather, acquisition and learning lie on a continuum. I use the terms acquisition and learning interchangeably.

Children learning a second language have the advantage of already knowing a first language. They know what language is, and what it does (Tabors, 1997). In addition, some concepts and knowledge about the world may already be internalized. For example, a child may understand the concept of "time" or what the amount of "seven" is; therefore, only the word in the second language is needed. There is also evidence that the L1 and the L2 are related and interdependent. If a child has well developed literacy skills in the L1, these will transfer to literacy skills in the L2 (Cummins, 2000). Despite the relationship between the L1 and the L2, there are many individual factors that can affect acquisition of another language. A child's motivation to learn the language, the amount of exposure to the second language, the child's age, and the child's personality all affect acquisition of English (Tabors, 1997; Wong-Fillmore, 1991).

Research on the effect of age on language acquisition is inconclusive. On the one hand, it appears that younger children learn the language quickly, but other researchers claim that language acquisition is more successful for older children (Law & Eckes, 2000). Tabors (1997) suggests that younger children are better able to learn a second language because the cognitive demand is low; however, they may also take longer to learn the language because their cognitive capacity is not as great as that of older children. Krashen (1982) suggests that younger children learn the language because they are immersed in it (acquisition); whereas, older learners may be concerned with learning the rules and grammar of the language.

There is general agreement that what is necessary in the classroom for effective language acquisition is a social environment where children have a desire to communicate and be understood in authentic ways, and where there is exposure to proficient English speakers (Cummins, 2001; Fassler, 1998; Genesee, 1994; Olmedo, 2003; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). Exposure to proficient English speakers can also be a hurdle for ELL learners. Fassler (1998) describes the task of gaining favor of English speakers as a "challenge" for young children who do not speak the dominant language. However, if a child possesses personality traits such as risk-taking and self-confidence (Wong-Fillmore, 1991), language acquisition is more successful. Wong-Fillmore (1979) studied individual differences among kindergarten students, and noticed that a young girl who was more outgoing than other language learners progressed quickly in her second language acquisition because of her willingness to take risks with her language, and her ability to interact freely with English speakers. Children also feel pressure to "fit in" socially, which may affect contributions to class discussions. In her study of ELL students in high school social studies classes, Duff (2001) noticed that the students contributed little to class discussions for fear of being laughed at, or because they did not understand the intertextual and pop culture references.

Barriers to Language Acquisition

Teachers of ELL students face four significant barriers to meaningful instruction which relate well to Cummins' (2001) language proficiency model: cognitive load, culture load, language load and learning load (Meyer, 2000). All four "loads" are not distinct, but are overlapping and interrelated.

Cognitive load refers to the number of new concepts embedded in a lesson, or a text. As children progress through the grades, cognitive load becomes heavier as activities and texts contain more academic language and information. Students are at an advantage if they have some background knowledge about the concept.

Culture load refers to cultural knowledge that is needed to appropriately particip7ate in classroom discourse. Lisa Delpit's (1988) work with the black and poor students in the United States has raised awareness of the "culture of power" that exists in classrooms. There are certain cultural ways of talking, dressing and interacting, for example, and Delpit suggests that gaining explicit knowledge about the rules of a culture makes acquiring power easier. She uses the example of visiting a foreign country. When a native of the country explains the appropriate dress and embedded meanings of the culture, the visit is likely to be a more pleasurable experience. When the rules of the language (e.g. how language expresses meanings, social relationships, and values) are not explicitly taught, then mainstream students who have been immersed in the rules of the culture are privileged, and students from non-mainstream cultures are at a disadvantage (Hicks, 1996). In literacy instruction, explicitness may be equated by some to a traditional focus on skills in isolation, but Delpit does not advocate a skills approach. Instead, she recommends that teachers be explicit about cultural knowledge. Often ELL students are expected to figure out and fit into new cultural expectations, without explanation or guidance (Meyer, 2000). ELL children need to learn how to be socially integrated into the life of the school, not only for academic success in school, but for jobs and future economic security as adults.

Culture load also refers to language meanings, and classroom discourse. Words have meaning in context, and in relation to how they are used in a particular culture. For

example, a story about the cultural practice of taking money from a piggybank to buy a toy may not be understood by someone from another culture. In other words, there may not be a direct translation of a group of words due to inherent cultural meanings. The kind of talk the teacher expects in the classroom, such as when, how and who contributes, is also culture load. Children bring expectations about talking to the school setting that may vary from the culture of school (Heath, 1983).

Language load refers to the sheer number of new words that children face in a school day, including synonyms, idioms, multi-syllable words, and academic language that may be spoken rapidly or ambiguously. ELL students may be intimidated and overwhelmed as a result. Teachers can lighten the language load by speaking slowly, by breaking complex sentences into simpler sentences, and by explaining academic vocabulary.

Learning load refers to the tasks and activities that teachers ask ELL students to do. Whether or not these students can be successful with such tasks depends on their proficiency in English. Consider, for example, the fast paced oral activity of "brainstorming" which may be difficult for an ELL student because words and ideas have to be thought of spontaneously. Teachers can be cognizant of what they ask of ELL students, and structure activities accordingly.

Students face other barriers to language acquisition when they enter the Canadian classroom. First, despite efforts toward collaborative and interactive learning, the traditional pattern of teacher initiation, student response, and teacher feedback (IRE) is still predominant in today's classrooms (Cazden, 2001; Skidmore, Perez-Parent & Arnfield, 2003; Wells, 2001). Fassler (1998) found that teachers may, in fact, inhibit understanding by dominating the discussion too much. Children have a desire to communicate if opportunities are given that invite reflection, opinion, analysis or problem-solving. Conventional literacy practices, such as the IRE pattern, may disempower students of diverse backgrounds, with the result that they have difficulty attaining high levels of literacy "that would enable them to reflect on, critique, and address situations of inequity" (Au, 1998).

Second, teachers and fellow students may not be cognizant of ELL students and their cultural background. Cummins (2001) suggests that interactions which take place between students and teachers are central to student success; however, these relationships are often unintentionally disempowering for students when the home language and culture is not acknowledged. Au (1998, p. 300) echoes his view: "The nature of relations of power, whether coercive or collaborative, within the larger society leads to the development of educational structures that shape the interactions among educators and students in schools." The research suggests that teachers need to be knowledgeable about their students as members of a wider community, and plan instruction that builds on the first language (Au, 1998; Cummins, 2001; Freeman & Freeman, 2003; Genesee, 1994).

The third barrier to language acquisition is related to the first two, in that educators who teach reading to ELL students tend to focus on basic skills, such as grammar and pronunciation, instead of spending time on meaning construction and authentic communication (Au, 2002; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Martinez-Roldan, 2000). Rote activities foster boredom and limit students' opportunities to learn to read, and may lead ELL students to fall further behind in reading. The social environment of the classroom provides the context for language learning which goes beyond simply learning the code and the academic curriculum. ELL students benefit from language teaching that is integrated with content learning. In this way academic growth continues while the language is learned (Cummins, 2001; Genesee, 1994).

Clearly, acquiring a language for the purposes of succeeding in school is a complex process. Children learning English as a second language bring linguistic differences as well as cultural differences to school; therefore, the social interactions in classrooms are important. Sociocultural theory indicates that children learning English benefit from socially mediated activities where language can be used, practiced, and internalized. Learning another discourse is only possible through interactions in joint activity with others (Gee, 1996; Moll, 1990). Teaching and learning should be collaborative where "the structure and function of language is developed by using it socially" (Lantolf, 2000, p. 46). Therefore, the classroom should be structured so that

children have the opportunity to co-construct meaning through various activities with others.

Cummins' Language Proficiency Framework

BICS and CALP. Language proficiency in this study refers to the competency with which an individual can speak English. There is considerable debate about the length of time needed to acquire peer-appropriate levels of conversational and academic skills. In this study, I used Cummins' (2000, 2001) distinctions among three kinds of language proficiency: conversational fluency, academic language fluency, and discrete language skills. These distinctions are important to consider in understanding ELL students because each follows a different developmental path, and each responds differently to instructional practices in school.

The first kind of language proficiency is the conversational fluency that most children have mastered by the time they enter school at age five, termed basic interpersonal communication skills, or BICS. This is the language of everyday social contexts; the language of here and now. The language that one might hear on the playground is an example of BICS, because high-frequency words and simple grammatical constructions are used to converse with others. It is considered context embedded because the language is accompanied by gesture, intonation and facial expression. ELL students can develop a high degree of fluency in conversational English within a year or two of exposure to English-speaking peers (Cummins, 2000).

The second kind of language proficiency, termed cognitive academic language proficiency, or CALP, concerns the academic language of school. This is the language needed to be successful in the school setting, or the "linguistic rules of the game" that are expected in educational contexts (Cummins, 2000, p.55). It includes knowledge of the less frequent vocabulary of English, such as the vocabulary derived from Greek and Latin roots. CALP can also involve complex syntax, such as passive voice, as well as the specialized vocabularies of content areas, and the language of books. Academic language is more than just specialized vocabulary; it entails command of the oral and written

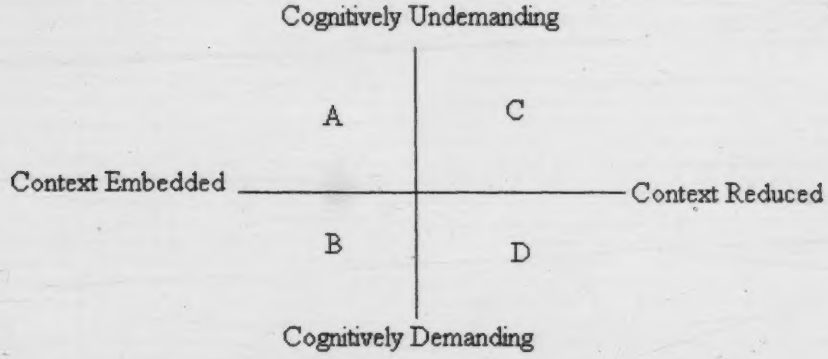
academic registers of schooling. CALP is considered context reduced because students must manipulate language to discuss abstract concepts, and produce complex written language. Five to seven years are required for ELL students to become as proficient as their peers in the academic language of school.

Cummins (2001) referred to the third dimension of language proficiency as "discrete language skills" which students acquire as a result of direct instruction and practice (p. 65). These language skills include phonological and grammatical knowledge, as well as conventions about spelling, capitalization and punctuation. Children often learn these specific skills concurrently with vocabulary development and conversational fluency throughout their school years. I include a description of discrete language skills to provide a complete picture of Cummins' distinctions of language proficiency; however, conversational and academic proficiency will be the focus of the theoretical framework of this study.

Since every interaction takes place within a context, an explanation of Cummins' (2001) use of this term is necessary. "Context," in Cummins' framework, refers to the supports available for expressing or receiving meaning. A student actively tries to make content and language meaningful, or "actively contextualizes" (Cummins, 2001, p. 67) content and language. He stresses that contextual support includes the characteristics of language and instructional presentation, or "external context" as well as the life experiences and prior knowledge of the learner, termed "internal context" (Cummins, 2001, p. 66). For example, in context embedded situations language is supported by meaningful cues, such as gesture and tone of voice, and the participants can actively provide feedback as to whether the message has been understood. In context reduced situations, a student must rely primarily on linguistic cues to meaning that are independent of the immediate communicative context. "Thus, successful interpretation of the message depends heavily both on students' background knowledge and on their knowledge of the specific vocabulary, grammar, and discourse conventions that express the meaning of the message" (Cummins, 2001, p. 67).

Another way to conceive of Cummins' (2001) framework is to consider the competence with native language that five-year olds have when they come to school. They can express themselves adequately and can understand most of what is spoken to them in familiar social contexts. Schools expand on this basic language and extend it to academic language, which is needed in order to progress through the grades. If the basic functional language of a five-year old is compared to the language of a twelve-year old, they would have similar levels of proficiency in BICS. Both children would have reached a plateau of conversational skills at about age five, but the twelve-year old would be much more proficient in the reading and writing required to function at school (CALP).

There is more to Cummins' (2001) framework than range of contextual support. Academic and conversational language can also be distinguished by the cognitive demand that a language task requires. Cummins conceptualized the framework as the intersection of two continua, illustrated below, one relating to contextual support, the other relating to the cognitive processes involved. These dimensions are not independent, but rather work together.



Quadrant A involves language that is context embedded and cognitively undemanding. An example of Quadrant A is the conversation one might hear on the playground (BICS), where meaning is supported by facial expression, gesture, and tone of voice. Quadrant D, the academic language of school, requires high cognitive processes and is minimally supported by interpersonal or contextual cues, such as the cognitive and linguistic skills involved in writing an essay. Quadrant B includes tasks that are

cognitively demanding, but which are contextually supported. This language occurs in cooperative group activities, or persuading a peer that your point of view is correct. Quadrant C consists of practice or review activities that are context reduced and cognitively undemanding. Ideally, Cummins (2001) suggests, students should move from Quadrant A to B, and from B to D, because "language and content will be acquired most successfully when students are challenged cognitively but provided with the contextual and linguistic supports or scaffolds required for successful task completion (p. 71)."

The implication of the distinction between BICS and CALP is that English language learners may appear to understand, speak, and read English well, because they are competent in BICS. However, they may have difficulty with school-related tasks, because they are still in the process of acquiring CALP. Cummins (2001) comments that "many ELL students who have acquired fluent conversational skills are still a long way from grade-level performance in academic language proficiency" (p. 66). Academic proficiency takes much longer to acquire for two reasons. First, English language learners must catch up to a moving target; their English L1 peers are also growing and developing their language abilities in the school setting. Second, BICS is supported by contextual cues, whereas academic language requires using language without contextual supports to complete tasks and communicate successfully in the context of school.

Cummins (2000) notes that he developed this construct of language proficiency to address issues related to programming and assessment of English language learners. Time is needed to acquire academic proficiency; therefore, the task of teaching ELL students is the work of all teachers through long-term programming. The academic difficulties of ELL students are heightened due to educators' lack of awareness of BICS and CALP when considering psycho-educational assessments. Teachers and psychologists may believe that because ELL students can converse fluently in English, they have mastered English to the same extent as their native-speaking peers. Then, when ELL students do not score as well on tests as their English counterparts, teachers mistakenly assume that there is a learning disability. The consequence of this assumption is that ELL students are put in remedial or special needs programming, but in fact, poor standardized test results

are not indicative of learning disabilities, nor of ineffective teachers or schools. Cummins' framework advises that ELL students need time and support to become as proficient as native English speakers.

This framework was developed to account for the gap in learning between ELL students and their native English-speaking peers and was meant to be applied only in the sociocultural context of schooling. The construct was not meant as an overall theory of language, nor was it meant to explain language acquisition.

Related Theoretical Constructs. Cummins' (2000) construct is not meant to be a dichotomy, nor is it meant to suggest that BICS and CALP develop separately, or one after the other. "Consistent with a Vygotskian perspective on cognitive and language development, BICS and CALP both develop within a matrix of social interaction" (Cummins, 2000, p. 4). Cummins adds that this framework was not meant to imply a deficit theory of language learning, but rather the framework takes into account the specific linguistic register needed to be successful in the context of school. He explains that other language uses, such as street language or joke-telling, may be no less sophisticated than academic language. However, this kind of language proficiency would not be CALP because joke-telling or street language lacks the educational context of school. Similarly, an individual may have a broad lexical knowledge of a topic such as plants, but this degree of specialized knowledge goes *beyond* what is expected in educational contexts.

Cummins' (2000) construct of conversational language and academic language derives from Vygotsky's (1934/1986) distinction between spontaneous and scientific concepts and his theory that language and literacy emerge from a social context. A social constructivist approach focuses on the collaborative construction of knowledge, where new understandings are integrated with students' prior knowledge and experience. Particularly important to consider is the zone of proximal development, or the distance between a child's developmental level and potential development. Moll (1990) notes that Vygotsky did not specify exactly how the zone of proximal development might be enacted between two people in educational contexts, and that this lack of specificity

resulted in various interpretations. Moll suggests that classroom discourse is an important context for the application of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory. Therefore, the characteristics of classroom discourse (Cazden, 2001), and the relationships established in school (Cummins, 2000, 2001; Gee, 1996) will be central to this study.

Cummins' (2001) distinction between conversational and academic language can be viewed as subsets of Gee's (1996) description of discourses. Gee (1996) used the term discourse to describe "connected stretches of language that make sense" (p. 127) and he differentiates between two dimensions of discourse: **D**iscourse and **d**iscourse. The capitalized **D**iscourse refers to the social environment that one is immersed in; children are socialized into a primary **D**iscourse as members of particular families. The secondary **d**iscourses are those which children and adults must learn in order to become part of a particular social group, for example, the discourse of school. Children are expected to figure out the discourse of school, such as the rules governing how talk is used across classroom activities. The discourse of school can only be learned through active social practice, which, Gee notes, schools are poor at facilitating because of a lack of opportunities that invite dialogue.

Both Cummins (2000; 2001) and Gee (1996) also emphasized the importance of establishing positive relationships at school. Cummins (2000) acknowledged the importance of the ZPD as the place where minds meet and new understandings form. Equally important are the identities that are negotiated in this space, or the interpersonal space of teacher-student interactions. He asserts that when students' cultural, linguistic, and personal identities are affirmed, then students will engage in the learning process. This relationship is reciprocal. When students feel that their teacher believes in them and cares for them, they learn. The more they learn, "the more their academic self-concept grows, and the more academically engaged they become" (Cummins, 2001, p. 126). When teachers interact with culturally diverse students, Cummins (2001) asserts, these interactions are never neutral; the interactions either challenge or reinforce the power relations of the wider society. Both Cummins (2001) and Gee propose that the gap in

literacy achievement evident among minority groups may be linked to deep-seated social issues rather than an illiteracy problem, because relationships established in school can be disempowering for students and communities, often unintentionally. For example, when teacher-student interaction communicates to students that they leave their "language and culture at the schoolhouse door," students are less likely to feel affirmed (Cummins, 2001, p. 126). "At best, [home languages] are treated with benign neglect and ignored; at worst, educators consider them an obstacle to the acquisition of English...and discourage their use in school and at home" (Cummins, 2006b, p. 5). Teachers can play a significant role in helping ELL students feel like valued participants in the learning community of the classroom by showing interest in each child's background and culture. When students' identity is affirmed, respect and trust are established, and they are more likely to succeed in school (Cummins, 2001). Cummins' language proficiency framework of a focus on meaning, use and language relates well to Rosenblatt's (1989) reader response theory. I discuss her theory next.

Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory

An explanation of reading is necessary before discussing Rosenblatt's (1994) reader response theory. Reading is a transactive process which involves a complex negotiation between the text and the reader to construct meaning (Goodman, 2005; Rosenblatt, 1989). For the purpose of this study, the term "text" refers to stories, posters, textbooks, poems, and is limited to print-based materials because these are what constituted reading in this classroom. However, I acknowledge the increasing multiplicity of texts as they are related to other modes such as the visual, the audio, and the spatial (New London Group, 1996). The text is merely marks on the page until a reader draws from past experience and knowledge to assign meaning. Transaction refers to human activities and relationships in which "the individual and the social, cultural, and natural elements interfuse (Rosenblatt, 1989, p. 154)." Hence, no two readings are exactly alike. The meaning that a reader creates is individual, influenced by prior knowledge and culturally situated experiences. Because of this, words themselves do not function in

isolation, but carry the meaning that an individual ascribes to them. Words stir up certain associations, feelings, experiences and connotations. As Vygotsky (1934/1986) states, "the sense of a word is the sum of all the psychological events aroused in our consciousness by the word" (p. 244).

Reading is also social. As we talk about our individual meanings with others, interpretations of the text are shared, resulting in enlarged or altered individual meanings. There is a kind of to-and-fro interplay between the reader and the text as the reader looks for cues as to the structure of the text, and synthesizes and reconfigures what the text is about to create meaning. Reading as a social process comprises two features: group interaction about the text can evoke different responses which prompt growth in reading ability and critical thinking (Ruddell, Ruddell & Singer, 1994); and the reading event itself establishes what counts as reading through interaction between teacher and students (Bloome & Theodorou, 1985). For example, the teacher and students in a particular reading group establish what counts as reading when they determine what, who, and how interaction will take place. Reading is also recursive and interactive. The reader brings an expectation to the text, and is constantly revising and synthesizing what is read to construct an interpretation of the text. Clearly, then, reading is a complex process with many factors at play.

Rosenblatt (1994) notes that a reader approaches a text from a particular stance, which affects the reader's response to the text. A stance reflects a reader's purpose. For example, when reading scientific writing, the reader may be concerned with information that s/he can take away from the text, which Rosenblatt (1994) termed an "efferent" stance (p. 24). Attention "is focused outward, so to speak, toward concepts to be retained (p. 24)," This focus generally occurs *after* the reading. In aesthetic reading, from the Greek word meaning "to sense" or "to perceive" (1981, p. 269), the reader is actively engaged *during* the reading. Attention is paid to the feelings and associations that are being lived through while reading the text. The distinction between the two stances "derives ultimately from what the reader does…the activities he carries out in relation to the text (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 27)." The two stances lie on a continuum, but usually a

reader will adopt predominantly one stance or the other. Text structures often give readers cues as to the stance they might take. For instance, uneven margins, short sentences, and descriptive phrases signal a poem; hence, an aesthetic stance is adopted. The same text can be read both aesthetically and efferently. A reader may read a text aesthetically, and then turn to an efferent analysis of the same text. Despite this crossover, the two stances are clearly distinguishable. Efferent reading is public; a person can read a text efferently and paraphrase it. Aesthetic reading, in contrast, is purely individual, or private. Inherent in any reading, though, are aspects of both private and public elements because individuals function in social contexts. Hence, there is a mix of public and private meaning in each stance.

Literature has the power to help children understand themselves, others, and their world. In order to accomplish this, texts must be dealt with in more than just a cursory manner. An efferent stance is often required in the public (school) setting when teachers ask students to respond to comprehension questions, or to find the main idea of a passage. An aesthetic stance, on the other hand, evokes an individual, meaning-making response, which invites a deeper engagement with text; the kind of literature experience desirable for students to truly engage with a text.

Integrating Rosenblatt and Cummins

Rosenblatt's (1981) transactional theory of reading integrates with Cummins' (2001) framework of academic and conversational language proficiency in fascinating ways to create an original pedagogical view of English language learners. Rosenblatt's (1981) stances involve cognitive and affective elements, as well as public and private elements. Cummins' (2001) framework differentiates conversational and academic language and highlights the importance of teacher-student interaction for student success. Consideration of both theories invites a pedagogical view that incorporates CALP and reader response theory as necessary vehicles to encourage students to engage and respond personally to literature. The focus of this study was to look at the talk that occurred during reading events. CALP is defined by Cummins (2000, 2001) as command of the

specialized vocabulary and functions of language that are characteristic of the language used in school. ELL students need opportunities to speak and use language to express their understandings of the text, whether aesthetic or efferent. If readers are encouraged to engage in personally meaningful transactions with the text, as Rosenblatt (1989) advises, then communication across social, cultural and historical differences can be fostered. This contributes to the positive relationship among students and teachers that Cummins (2000) suggests is so important for success at school.

A sociocultural perspective toward reader response helps me to address my research question of how students, and in particular English language learners, can effectively engage with, and respond to texts during reading events. Cummins (2001) proposes that academic language proficiency develops through a focus on language, meaning and use. These will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4 when I describe how these areas of focus were used for data analysis.

The Reading Process and the English Language Learner

Students whose first language is other than English face more challenges in meaning-making in English classrooms than do students from the English-speaking culture. They bring prior experiences and background knowledge to the text that may not match the knowledge required to read a text written in English; they may have varied ways of speaking compared to the discourse of school; or their oral language proficiency prohibits them from comprehending the text and/or contributing to group discussions. There is disagreement as to how proficient an ELL student's oral language must be to understand a text; a disagreement due in part to the relative importance ascribed to the different components of oral language, namely phonology, semantics, syntax and pragmatics. Droop (2003), in his study of third and fourth grade Dutch students, stated that oral proficiency was of critical importance to comprehension, and should be developed before reading instruction. Anderson and Roit (1996), on the other hand, recommend that reading be taught as soon as ELL students have a receptive understanding of English. Their reasoning, with which I agree, is that reading is more

than a translation of symbols to speech, and that a focus on comprehension provides a gateway to language development. The reciprocity between learning to read, and reading to learn has implications for developing the oral language of ELL students. Cummins (2001) suggests that "there is strong evidence that comprehensible input through extensive reading in the second language can be highly effective in promoting L2 proficiency" (p. 88). He adds that students get access to academic language through reading.

Learning to read also involves knowledge of language and knowledge of the orthographic system. A student must have phonological skills as well as knowledge of words in their spoken form, the ability to integrate the syntactic and semantic relationships among words, and inferential skills to comprehend a text (Catts, Fey, Zhang & Tomblin, 1999; Scarborough, 2001). For example, an ELL student may be able to decode words but have a limited understanding of what those words mean (Cummins 2001). Other factors that affect reading comprehension for ELL students are vocabulary instruction, collaborative talk, and culturally sensitive practices. I discuss these factors next.

Vocabulary Instruction. Effective vocabulary instruction is critical for English language learners. There is a huge gap between the word knowledge of ELL students and their native English-speaking peers. This gap is difficult to close even with explicit vocabulary instruction (Carlo, August, McLaughlin, Snow, Dressler, Lippman, Lively et al., 2004). All students are learning the academic language of school, but ELL students are attempting to catch up to a moving target. If a native-speaking student makes a ten-month gain in vocabulary in a ten-month school year, then an ELL student must make a fifteen month gain in that same ten-month school year to catch up to grade norms (Cummins; 2006a).

The understanding of word meanings and their use contributes to reading comprehension. Many studies show that vocabulary development is essential for the reading success of ELL students (Anderson & Roit, 1996; Birch, 2007; Carlo, et al., 2004; Droop & Verhoeven, 2003; Gersten & Baker, 2000; Gersten & Jimenez, 1994;

Jiminez, 1997). This is especially true in the upper elementary grades when the academic vocabulary load increases dramatically, and students are expected to read more complex and abstract text. Some students may begin to fall behind in school, often referred to as the fourth grade slump, and ELL students are particularly susceptible to this phenomenon (Cummins, 2006a). Their reading achievement may be at grade level in the primary grades, but it slows down when proficiency in academic vocabulary is required in the higher grades to be successful at school.

August, Carlo, Lively, McLaughlin and Snow (2006) implemented a vocabulary enrichment program for ELL students, which included context activities, deep-processing activities (development of word depth), cognate activities and structural activities. They found that these students made gains in vocabulary development and reading comprehension over time. Other researchers suggest that ELL students need sources for encountering new words and repeated exposure to those words, explicit instruction on word meanings, learning strategies to become independent word learners, and opportunities to make connections between new words and known words to build their vocabulary (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2000; Linan-Thompson, 2007).

Collaborative Talk. Anderson and Roit (1996) note that there is research on how to teach ELL students to speak, but little information on how to help ELL students understand what they read, while they read. In terms of comprehension, the effective teaching strategy that is most pervasive throughout the literature is that ELL students benefit from extended oral discourse around texts. Learners make sense of their world through talk, and it is through talk that teachers and students construct meaning. ELL children need opportunities to elaborate responses, engage in natural conversations with one another, and work collaboratively (Anderson & Roit, 1996; Cummins, 2001; Gersten & Jiminez, 1994; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Meyer, 2000; Van den Branden, 2000). Wells and Chang-Wells (1996) posit that literate thinking evolves through collaborative talk and internalization. Discussion after reading is a valuable form of response for any student in that it allows children to construct richer understandings and move to deeper levels of thinking (Spiegel, 1998). Rosenblatt (1989) notes that when readers share their

insights and interpretations, a deeper level of understanding of language occurs. Classroom practices that encourage ELL involvement in discussion, however, are rare (Gersten & Jiminez, 1994).

Not only is the interaction between teacher and student important, but peer interactions also play a major role in helping ELL students develop language skills and understand text (Fassler, 1998; Goodman, 2005; Olmedo, 2003; Van den Branden, 2000; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). Olmedo's (2003) study of bilingual children, for example, showed that children can adjust their language to facilitate other children's comprehension and communication. Van den Branden (2000) found that when children learning another language were given opportunities to negotiate the meaning of a text with peers, they were better able to comprehend the text. Children need opportunities to negotiate meaning and understandings with others (Au, 1998; Gee, 1996; Moll, 1990).

Culturally Sensitive Practices. Teachers of ELL students can support student learning through a variety of culturally sensitive practices. Teachers can choose appropriate texts that reflect a particular culture (Eskey, 2002), use the expertise in their students' communities as "funds of knowledge" (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994), draw on the ELL students' cultural background knowledge, and allow ELL students to use their first language (code-switch) to embrace a culturally aware stance. "Funds of knowledge" refers to the knowledge, experience, and resources that students, and their families and communities, contain. When schools validate that knowledge, and invest time and energy to bridge school and community, teachers gain deeper insights and understanding of the larger world of their students (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002).

Other specific strategies that teachers can incorporate when reading with ELL students vary, but include explaining things in more than one way (flexible language use), instruction in comprehension strategies, explanation of important and unimportant text segments, scaffolded support (e.g. use of graphic organizers), development of a shared language to talk about books, activation of background knowledge, minimal use of idioms, and presentation of ideas in both verbal and written form (Anderson & Roit, 1996; Cummins, 2001, Eskey, 2002; Gersten & Jiminez, 1994; Kong & Pearson, 2003).

Terminology

Guided Reading. The purpose of my case study was to look at teacher and student interactions during teacher-directed reading events. I felt that it was important to observe the dynamics of teacher-pupil dialogue in guided reading groups because these observations might provide insight into my research question of how ELL students construct meaning, and the role that oral language plays in that process.

Guided reading is a component of a program widely practiced in the school district where this study took place. It is patterned after Fountas and Pinnells' *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children* (1996). Students who have similar instructional reading levels are grouped together for instruction. The teacher selects an appropriate text for this particular group of students (one that is slightly beyond their independent reading level), and notes beforehand aspects of the text that will provide support and challenges. Depending on the book and the students, challenges may include difficult words, concepts, or text structures, the plot and characters, or inferential thinking. The teacher tailors the introduction to the needs of the group, links the book to prior knowledge, and sets a purpose for reading. The introduction of the book is the most important part of the guided reading lesson because it provides the scaffold for students to read the book successfully (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). After the introduction, children are asked to read their individual copies to a certain point in the book. Students are invited to talk about the book after the book has been read by all students. The teacher may focus on reading strategies, or revisit portions of the text. Occasionally, extension activities, such as art or drama, are done with the text.

While children are reading independently, the teacher reads with one of the students in the group, and this provides an opportunity to communicate informally and work diagnostically with that student. She might teach vocabulary, give prompts or teach reading strategies. The session is wrapped up with a short discussion of children's responses or by focusing on words that may have proven difficult. The suggested time for guided reading is twenty to twenty-five minutes, with five to seven minutes devoted to

the introduction and conclusion, and twelve to fifteen minutes devoted to actual reading time.

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) suggest two essential elements of guided reading: "First, the text must provide the right level of support and challenge for the children's current processing abilities...second, the text must be introduced in a way that gives children access to it while leaving some problem solving to do" (p. 135). The premises are that children make reading progress when they read with support at their instructional level, and that reading is a problem-solving activity.

Guided reading draws on the work of Clay (1991) and her Reading Recovery work which has shown that young readers make progress when they move through gradients of text that offer the right amount of challenge. Books used for guided reading are leveled so that students can gradually move through increasingly difficult text. In this way, whole classrooms can be accommodated, rather than instruction with one student as is the case in Reading Recovery. In Reading Recovery, Clay notes that the teacher provides some guidance that might occur either before, during or after reading, but that the children read "mostly by themselves" (p. 199). She adds that children should come to know reading as a meaning making process.

From a theoretical perspective, the practice of reading with children at their instructional level is meant to be consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development. The support of the teacher helps the child read a text which they could not read independently, and then to move from that text to a text of slightly greater difficulty. "The skill is to accommodate zones within multilevel groupings…to ensure that all children make progress as literacy learners" (Brailsford & Coles, 2004, p. 18). In addition, the time that the teacher spends with one student, while others in the group read alone, allows for one-on-one talk time, and the teacher can further scaffold that student's individual learning needs. Through teacher support and appropriate text, the intent is for students to develop as readers. The focus of this study was on the oral language that occurred during guided reading. Therefore, there will be an extended discussion of guided reading in chapter 9 of this dissertation.

Reading Events. A "reading event" can be defined as a sharing of text between people, and there may be talk about the text (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). The use of the word "event" highlights the social context and situated nature of literacy. In this study, reading events provided the communicative context for observation of oral discourse among ELL students, their peers, and the teacher. My original intent was to look at guided reading, whole class read alouds, in which the teacher reads aloud to the whole class, and partner reading, in which children read a text together; however, the children in this classroom did not engage in partner reading during the time of my study. Consequently, I focused on guided reading, and to a lesser extent, whole class read alouds. I was interested in these particular reading events because they are teacher-designated reading events. In other words, the teacher has structured time and/or instruction for these reading activities, and students have internalized these events as reading events.

Whole Class Read Alouds. The last reading event, "whole class read alouds" or shared reading, is when the teacher selects a book or text to read aloud to the whole class, and students sit so that they can see the book (Tompkins, 1998). Discussion may occur before, during and after the reading event, and can be controlled by the teacher, or talk may digress as children share their personal experiences and responses to the story.

To summarize, Vygotsky's (1934/1986) theory that learning is socially situated provides a broad framework with which to look at the language and literacy development of English language learners while participating in reading events. Children learning English are at an advantage if they are proficient in their first language, but they still face myriad challenges in Canadian classrooms. The process of learning another language involves learning the discourse of school as well as the language itself. The complementary theories of Cummins (2001) and Rosenblatt (1989) assisted my examination of the oral discourse surrounding reading events. Rosenblatt's efferent/aesthetic continuum gave perspective to student response, and Cummins' suggestion that language proficiency develops through a focus on meaning, a focus on

language, and a focus on use gave me a structure with which to analyze my data. I describe the methodology I used in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

The Design of the Study

I made the decision that the questions guiding this study could best be explored through an interpretive case study. Case study is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (Merriam, 1998, p. 21). Case study would enable me to develop insight into my question of how ELL students construct meaning from text through social interaction, because it is a way of investigating complex social units, often with many variables that may contribute to understanding the phenomenon. Stake (1995) defines the case as "a specific, complex, functioning thing;" it is an integrated system (p. 2). The end result is a thick description and thorough account of the phenomenon which often advances a field's knowledge base. I felt that my findings would bring about a refinement of what is already known about ELL students and the value of talk in the classroom, and that observing reading events in a primary classroom would shed light on my inquiry.

The goal of qualitative research is to look for the meanings that people construct and to interpret those meanings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113). I was interested in the socially enacted reading event, and with the perceptions of the children I studied as they made sense of what they read and discussed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). What is the classroom experience like for an English language learner, I wondered? Although I knew what I wanted to research, beginning my case study was like being dropped into unknown territory and having to determine my route. Before I could proceed, I had to get a sense of the terrain and the context of the workings of the classroom. I had to pay attention to speaking turns, what and how things were said, the way children were grouped, the distribution of time, and other influences within the social activities of this particular classroom.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) outline five features of qualitative research which helped to guide my study. First, the research took place in the natural setting of the classroom, and I was the key instrument for the data collection. I was the primary person

who observed children in the school setting while they were immersed in literacy events. Stake (1995) notes that the most distinctive characteristic of qualitative inquiry is its emphasis on interpretation; I placed myself in the classroom and recorded what was happening around me in relation to my question. At the same time, I could not help interpreting what I observed, which in turn affected what I observed.

Second, qualitative research is descriptive. Thick description gives the reader an understanding of what is happening at a particular time and in a particular case. I kept field notes, described situations, observed events, talked to children and tape recorded conversations. Third, qualitative research is concerned with the process of the inquiry. I had to consider the context of the study and ascertain how participants created meaning.

Fourth, qualitative research is analyzed inductively. Ellis (1998) describes data collection as a spiral of loops with each loop representing an activity to begin the inquiry. Findings from the first loop are used to guide the direction of the next loop, and so forth. In this sense, there is no single correct method (Smith, 2002) because the investigation itself provides the answers for the next step of the process. Stake (1995) notes that the researcher "records objectively what is happening but simultaneously examines its meaning and redirects observation to refine or substantiate those meanings" (p. 8).

The last characteristic of qualitative research is the notion of meaning. "Meaning is of essential concern to the qualitative approach" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 32). In qualitative work the researcher attempts to understand, or interpret, the meanings of another. Therefore, the researcher is cautious about constructing those meanings.

The Research Site

The case is constructed and not found (Dyson & Genishi, 2005); therefore, I needed to make decisions about where I would do my research, whom I would study, what data I would collect, and how I would collect that data. The summer before my research began, I encountered a colleague who offered her classroom as a possible site for my research. She was a Grade 3 teacher who taught in an urban classroom where ELL students attended, so I kept her offer in mind as I completed my research proposal that

fall. I had previously taught at the same school as she did, and so was familiar with the people, the environment, and the philosophy of the school. The school is part of a collaborative group of seven inner city schools where cooperative learning and interaction are valued and practiced. After I received ethics approval from the school district the following spring, this teacher, whom I shall call Wynn Gosse (all names are pseudonyms) agreed to allow my research to take place in her classroom. I began my research after the students returned from spring break, which was at the beginning of April.

The School

My research was conducted in a Grade 3 classroom at an urban school in Western Canada. The school is situated in the inner city drawing from a population of low income and immigrant families. The children who attend this school qualify for a hot lunch and a snack program. At the time of my study, there were 140 students enrolled in kindergarten through Grade 6. The population of the school fluctuated throughout the school year, but in general, there were a few students in every classroom who spoke a language other than English at home. These languages included: Cree, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Romanian, Cambodian and sign language. Initiatives were in place to embrace and celebrate the various cultural groups that attended the school, especially the Aboriginal population. For example, a woman of Aboriginal descent was hired on a short term basis by a group of inner city schools, to circulate among the schools to tell stories, show artifacts, and sing songs derived from the First Nations culture. Aboriginal dance groups were invited to perform yearly at the school, and events such as a Round Dance were also held each year. The school library had many books related to Aboriginal themes. The resources and activities in the school appeared to emphasize the Aboriginal cultures. However, there were also indicators that other cultural groups were considered: during student-led conferences, a translator for Asian speaking parents was available to help with explanations of progress to parents. At the beginning of the school year, the monthly newsletter was written in both English and Cantonese. At the end of the year, however,

the newsletter was only written in English. Wynn explained that the translation costs were too high to continue the newsletter in two languages.

The Participants

There were three students in Wynn's class who met my criteria of an English language learner, which was that they spoke a first language other than English at home. Tatiana's family was Romanian; Kenton's family originated from China; and Todd was of Vietnamese descent. I hoped to include all three students in my study. I decided to attend the student-led conferences at the school before the spring break where I was able to talk to parents informally about my research. I needed consent from all of the students' parents because their children's voices might be captured on tape during guided reading or whole class read alouds. Tatiana, Kenton and Todd's parents all willingly agreed to allow their children to participate and gave written consent that evening. Most parents gave their consent that evening, and others took the form home and returned it with their child after the spring recess. After the break, I attended school every morning to observe, to tape record interactions, and to take notes. The second day in the classroom, I explained to all of the students my reason for being in their room, and I asked them to sign the consent form if they agreed to be a part of the research. All three of these children, Tatiana, Kenton and Todd, returned their consent forms agreeing to participate in the study. The consent forms from the rest of the students in the class were returned except for one. This student forgot to return the form despite reminders from me. I decided that his form was not necessary to the study because he was not part of the guided reading groups that I observed, and he did not contribute often to class discussions.

I continued my presence in the classroom for April and May of that school year. My objective was to learn more about the reading experiences of English language learners, and this necessitated taking apart and analyzing the talk that happened in the reading groups. I entered the classroom as an experienced teacher, and current graduate student and researcher. I was empathetic to the ups and downs of classroom activity and

to the uncertainty of what can happen in classrooms, but on the other hand I was documenting what I saw from the point of view of a researcher. I was knowledgeable about the research advocating inquiry learning, the value of talk, and the importance of valuing the home language and culture of English language learners and I needed to analyze classroom talk against this backdrop of research. At times, I found the task difficult of maintaining my researcher stance, and not reverting to a teacher's perspective.

Procedures and Data Collection

Multiple methods were used for data collection. I was an observer of reading events and classroom interaction in addition to tape recording those events. I kept field notes, and I periodically interviewed the focal children and teachers who worked with these children. I focused on reading events because they provided the communicative context for observation of social interaction. My original intent was to observe guided reading, whole class read alouds, and partner reading. However, during my time in the classroom the students did not engage in partner reading. Guided reading, and to a lesser extent, whole class read alouds became the source of my data, both of which are structured reading events led by the teacher. I tried to record episodes as they were naturally occurring in the classroom in order to document the usual interaction among classroom participants. As much as possible, I tried to be non-interventive, a discreet observer. "We try hard to understand how the actors, the people being studied, see things and to preserve the multiple realities of what was happening" (Stake, 1995, p. 12).

I began my research by attending all of the events in the morning, including the morning snack and silent reading, the exercise program for the whole school in the gymnasium, calendar time and sharing of weekend activities, and then the guided reading groups which occurred one after the other until the recess break. Recess provided a time to talk informally with the teacher, in addition to the time before school started. After recess, there was occasionally a whole class read aloud. However, more often than not, the students had mathematics, or another activity unrelated to what I was researching. As

my time at the school continued, I stopped attending the morning exercises and focused instead on the guided reading and read aloud events.

During selected reading events, I began by simply observing and writing field notes about the children in interaction with each other and the teacher. On the first day, I began tape recording whole class read alouds and guided reading because I realized that observation was limited and that I needed to capture the verbal interactions. I also realized early on that there was more interaction between the teacher and individual students than among the students themselves. I had to pay attention to the nature of this kind of interaction. The focus of my observations broadened over the course of the study. Initially, I tape recorded interactions and made note of who said what. Later, I began to make note of gestures, the looks on the focal children's faces when other people spoke, and comments that might later help me to make sense of the reading experiences of ELL learners. I began my inquiry with "openness, humility and engagement" (Ellis, 1998, p. 18): "openness" in that I did not know which direction the study would proceed and I was open to possibilities; "humility" in that I was respectful of the teacher and her classroom routines, and I was willing to be a compliant observer; and "engagement" in that I became involved and caught up in the reading events I observed. Engagement is a key word here in that this is what sets interpretive inquiry apart from other kinds of human inquiry that may only describe human behaviour.

I transcribed as much as possible while collecting data, but soon got behind and did the remainder of the transcribing over the summer months. I decided to send a few of the guided reading tapes and the interview tapes to a transcriber to help with the volume of tapes to transcribe. This lightened my workload, but when I reviewed the transcriptions, there were many question marks and gaps due to uncertainty on the part of the transcriber when the tape was unclear. As a result, I often had to go back and listen to the tape and re-read the transcript to make sure it was correct, and that the right student was identified. I was able to fill in those gaps for the tapes I transcribed, because I knew the voices of the children and the context of what was said. In addition, my field notes provided information about the non-verbal gestures that accompanied the talk. Overall, I

feel that the time I spent transcribing was valuable. Not only was I able to fill in the gaps, I was also able to reflect upon the dialogue, and to see other perspectives that I hadn't seen while engaged with note taking and observation.

I developed a system of transcription markers to record what the students said, their inflections, pauses, hesitations, and other aspects of speech. Appendix A is a chart of transcription markers that I devised.

Interviews

I interviewed the three focal children at the beginning of the study to ascertain their background, history, and view of themselves as learners. I also wanted to get to know the focal children so that my knowledge of the students would help to inform my interpretation. Wynn, the teacher, was willing to have me take the students out of class for the interviews, and I was able to conduct them in a conference room across the hall from Wynn's classroom. These initial interviews were structured (see Appendix B); I had predetermined questions to ask the students, and they were about twenty minutes in duration. Questions varied from, "Where were you born?" to "If you had the day off school, what would you do with your free time?" During the study, I interviewed the children four times informally, either individually or in pairs, to get a sense of what had happened for them during the guided reading time. These informal interviews were conversational with such questions as "Tell me what happened in your guided reading group today as if I hadn't been there." I also wanted to get a sense of meaning-making, so I asked questions such as, "Can you tell me something that you learned in your guided reading group today? How did you learn about this?" or I asked the ELL students to show me words for which they did not know the meaning. My purpose for these conversations was to try to understand how the children saw the reading event. I wanted to hear what was happening from their perspective, and in this way, multiple views of the case are presented. At times, it was difficult to conduct an interview because the children were anxious to get outside for recess, or they just did not feel like talking with me at that particular moment. Despite this reluctance, the interviews confirmed what I had

witnessed in the guided reading group, and they shed light on the children's understanding of vocabulary, or aspects of the text. At the end of the study, I again talked with the three children, this time informally. I not only wanted to bring closure to my presence in their guided reading groups, I also wanted to get a final impression of their experiences. I talked to two of the focal children, Kenton and Todd together, and Tatiana by herself, because they were in separate reading groups.

When an adult interviews a child in the school setting, there are power relationships at play (Ellis, 2006). Children may feel as if they must please the interviewer, and give answers that they think the interviewer wants to hear. For this reason, I asked open questions during the first interview which invited the children to simply talk about themselves. Subsequent interviews were conversations about what happened during guiding reading. I tried to maintain an easygoing manner with the focal children, and I tried to avoid evaluative comments about what they said. At times it was difficult to talk with them without appearing to have an agenda. Tatiana easily digressed into other topics of conversation, and I would steer the talk back to guided reading. At other times, I let her talk about what she wanted. Kenton and Todd sometimes gave one-word answers or did not elaborate on their answers or experience. The interview at the end of the study was more easy-going than the initial interview. The boys shared some interesting insights with me about their kindergarten experiences, and their views of learning new words. I learned that establishing a rapport with the focal children was important to a successful interview.

My interactions with Wynn, for the most part, were informal. We would talk briefly after guided reading about something that was said, or that had happened, and she would give me her perspective and insights about the children and their abilities. I had a brief, formal interview with her about the cultural resources in the school. I also interviewed the division two reading resource teacher who worked closely with ELL students in the higher grades. I also spoke briefly with Irene, the aide in the classroom, about her perceptions, and informally with the Grade 2 teacher and kindergarten teacher who had two of the students in previous years.

Field Notes

While the teacher led the guided reading group and discussion, I jotted down what I observed. Initially my notes were first impressions and what the children said, but later I began to note facial expressions, gestures and other non-verbal cues. When I later transcribed the files, I made note of accompanying non-verbal actions next to what was said, and my field notes also served as a reference when the tape was unclear. In addition, I made a copy of the text that the children read, so that I would have a record of what was discussed. The text was also a reminder of the context of the conversation when I transcribed files weeks later. Occasionally I wrote a reflective passage in my field notes; patterns that I saw emerging and observations that I thought might later be significant.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical Standards of the University of Alberta. I sought and gained permission from the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board, and Cooperative Activities Program approval was granted in the early spring of 2005. I informed teachers, parents and children verbally and in writing that their anonymity was assured, that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The teacher whose classroom I visited, Wynn, as well as the aide in the classroom, Irene, willingly provided consent to participate in my study. Parents signed consent forms during student-led conferences the week before the actual study began. Children were told about the study upon return to school after spring break, and willingly provided consent at that time.

Trustworthiness

Several of the techniques that have been described worked to meet trustworthiness criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) such as prolonged engagement with the participants, triangulation of sources and triangulation of methods. Triangulation of sources included sharing and confirming insights with the teacher and former teachers of

the focal children in this school as data was collected, and later when patterns and categories emerged, I shared and discussed my analysis with my supervisor, Dr. Jill McClay. This allowed outside perspectives on the research which enhanced the credibility of my findings. The interviews with the focal children also contributed to the multiple views of the case. Triangulation of methods included my observations, interviews, audiotapes and field notes.

Delimitations of the Study

The findings of this study are limited, as is every research study. Some of the limitations I identified are that:

1) I studied literacy in the school context only, and not in the home environment. I acknowledge that, in this dissertation, I suggest that knowledge about the home language and culture of immigrant students can contribute to their success, and yet I did not include the home environment in my study. My intent was to see ELL students from the perspective of the classroom teacher who does not always have the time, resources, or support to visit her students' homes and families. Research into the home environment coupled with experiences at school would broaden and deepen this study.

2) I collected data from teacher-directed reading events only, and not throughout the whole school day across other subject areas. Research into the discourse around the content areas (e.g. Science, Social, Mathematics) would be beneficial especially in light of the growing awareness that ELL students must learn the academic language of school in order to be successful.

3) I limited my study to three ELL students, in Grade 3, and did not include more students across the primary grades. This study would be particularly interesting if carried out in Grades 4 to 6 when students read more content area materials which can be abstract in nature, and students are often required to work independently in the upper elementary grades.

4) I did not discuss gender differences in this particular study. Tatiana was able to participate in her reading group by verbalizing her thoughts and contributing to the

discussion; whereas Todd and Kenton were less able to do so. Future studies into gender differences of English language learners would be fascinating.

5) I was present in the classroom for two months which is a relatively short time span for qualitative research. If I had been present in the classroom for the whole school year, I would have been better able to comment on student growth, and likely would have seen different patterns of interaction emerge. In the short time that I was there, I saw a slight change in Kenton and Todd's confidence and ability to contribute responses. Whether or not this change was due to an increased comfort level in the guided reading group, or due to my presence and focused interest in them as participants is difficult to ascertain.

I hope to inform the direction of future study concerning the complexity of classroom discourse and its effect on ELL students, and to bring to the forefront an awareness of the importance of discourse for the benefit of all students in the classroom.

CHAPTER 4
DATA REPORTING AND ANALYSIS

Case study is interpretation in context. The context must be taken into consideration because it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from its context. In order to report my data, I will first provide a description of the classroom and my role there as a researcher, followed by a description of the focal children and the reading events to give a sense of what a typical day looked like in this particular Grade 3 classroom.

The Classroom

A typical day began with morning exercises in the gymnasium for all of the students in the school. The Grade 3 students then returned to class for snack time, silent reading, and "calendar" where the date and weather were discussed as well as any happenings in the children's lives, either at home or at school. Occasionally there was time for writing, introduction of spelling words or other required instruction until the guided reading groups formed at 9:55 am.

On the first day, I decided to dress casually in hopes that I would not "look like a teacher." I positioned myself at the back of the classroom on a child-sized chair at a reading table. From my vantage point, I observed as children entered the room after spring break. There was quiet chatter as they put on their indoor shoes, found a book to read, and caught up with news about each other. A calm, relaxed atmosphere pervaded the room. There was a new student in the class, Cam, and this caused some excitement, especially among the boys. Two boys gave each other a "high-five" as they counted girls and boys to see which group had more members. I began to write field notes of my first impressions, what was said and who was interacting with each other. I did not initiate conversation unless a student approached me first. If a child approached me with something to show me or tell me, I responded amicably. I wanted to give the impression of a friendly adult who was accessible. The students quietened when Wynn introduced

the new student in a soft voice. She also introduced me, telling the students that I was there to learn. A few children acknowledged me with a smile or a 'hello.'

Researcher Stance

It was impossible to detach myself from my research. I came to the Grade 3 classroom with certain beliefs and attitudes, previous experiences, scholarship, and a social position much different than the children I studied. My coursework gave me a knowledge base about the complexity of learning to read, write and make meaning from text. Preparation for my candidacy exposed me to the assertions of other researchers who have studied ELL students. My previous experience with inner city, immigrant children learning English led to the questions that guided my research. However, my social position was vastly different than that of the ELL children of my study who were not only learning English and trying to become a part of the community of learners in their classroom, but whose families were also struggling in the wider context of the community. I grew up in western Canada, and I speak English as my first and only language. I have not had the experience of learning another language in order to function as part of the dominant group. I have not had to relocate to another country due to economic or safety reasons; I have not had to struggle to make ends meet. However, my horizons, or prejudices (Ellis, 1998) have changed as a result of my contact with these ELL students. Although I could not give up my standpoint in order to understand that of another, I was open to their experiences because I shared in their community for a period of time. I could empathize with their challenges, and I attempted to understand their experiences through language. Smith (1993) notes that through "a dialogical encounter of questions and answers" (p. 137), horizons are broadened. My own personal perspective is very much a part of my analysis. "Qualitative case study is highly personal research" (Stake, 1995, p. 135) and the interactions between the students I studied and me are unique to this particular case. At the same time, I needed to constantly be aware of my prejudices and how they affected my research.

Before I entered the classroom, I needed to consider what role I would play there. I considered how I would dress, where I would sit, what I would say, and how I would establish a relationship with the children. I knew that I had to keep my former role as a teacher in this school separate from my new role as a researcher. I had to put on a different hat, stay on the sidelines, observe, and not intervene as I may have if I were a teacher. Even though I had previously taught at this school, I had not taught with Wynn, so she viewed me as a researcher and not a teacher. I explained my researcher stance to Wynn, namely that I would be a participant observer. I would be unable to instruct or discipline the children, although I would be happy to help in other ways, such as handing out materials. I told her that I would not be evaluating or second-guessing her teaching. Instead, my focus would be on observing the English language learners and the interactions between her and the children, and among the children themselves. I mentioned to her that she should not try to "polish" her lessons or change her usual way of teaching because of my presence in the classroom. I reassured her that because of my recent experience in the classroom, I knew how events in the classroom can sometimes go awry, and that one never knew for sure what was going to happen. I told her that I felt comfortable and in agreement with her way of teaching, and that I appreciated her respectful attitude with the children. Together we decided that I should be introduced to the children as a student who is learning about children at school, especially children learning English. The students were told that I would be watching them, listening to them, writing notes, and tape recording what they said, especially when they were reading in their groups. In fact, the students were told, I would be so busy writing my notes that I would be unable to help them with their school work. The ELL students involved in this study, hereinafter referred to as the focal children, will be described next.

The Focal Children

Tatiana

Tatiana, a bright, vivacious girl of nine, was born in Canada, but returned with her family to Romania for her early childhood years. She attended kindergarten and Grade 1

in Romania. Every summer, the family would return to Canada to visit family who lived here. Tatiana spoke Romanian before moving to Canada at the start of her Grade 2 year. Tatiana was exposed to English as a young child, but when asked if she spoke English well when she started school in Canada, she reported that she did not speak English. She told me that all she knew was "hi, bye, where are you going? and that's it." She had to learn to speak English and this experience, Tatiana told me, was very hard. When she first began school in Canada, she found that speaking Romanian when everyone else spoke English was "embarrassing." But her friends helped her to learn the language, and to read. I asked how her friends helped her to read, and she explained that one friend would tell Tatiana what words meant, and she would also read to her, and then, in Tatiana's words, Tatiana would "copy her." I am not sure how this worked, except to surmise that Tatiana could perhaps memorize the words, repeat them, and feel as if she were reading. Tatiana acknowledged that her teacher in Grade 2 also helped her to learn English by explaining things to her "two times or three." Tatiana made quick progress in learning English; she received an award for the student who showed the most improvement at the end of her Grade 2 year. Her teachers told me that this award recognized her amazing growth in language learning.

At home, Tatiana spoke Romanian, although she sometimes got English words and Romanian words mixed up. For instance, when she wanted to say something, she said some words in Romanian, and some words in English. She commented that she liked English better. When I asked her to say something in Romanian, she said "aaaww" reluctantly, and then "no way." I told her that I thought being able to speak two languages was impressive, and suggested that she say, "It's a nice day outside today" to encourage her to speak her native language. After a few moments she said this in Romanian, and I told her "That is so cool" to which she replied, "It isn't." She was not proud of the fact that she could speak two languages. This may be related to the outlook of the family. It appeared that the family left Romania because of the political situation and oppression there; Tatiana explained that the "minister" of Romania was "very mean."

The chance for a better life in Canada may also have been a factor. When I asked Tatiana what the best thing was about being her age, she gave a surprising answer. She said that she "gets the good things;" that her mom didn't get any food, or any hot water "in the ancient times" which I took to mean, in Romania. Her mother was not a good speaker of English, but when they moved to Canada, she would encourage Tatiana to learn English by telling her to "say it again, say it again" suggesting that learning English was a desirable goal. This was difficult for Tatiana. She commented that, "I started to cry. I couldn't handle it. It was so hard." Her older brother, who was in Grade 5 at the time of this study, also had to learn English when the family moved to Canada. Tatiana and her brother sometimes conversed in Romanian at home and sometimes in English. Tatiana appeared close to her brother, although in a typical brother-sister, love-hate relationship. She mentioned him many times during conversations I had with her and when sharing experiences during her guided reading group. At times they seemed to play together, and at other times, he made her angry. Tatiana's father worked out of town in the forestry business, and she said little about him. She told me that he was very good at building things. The family engaged in traditional religious celebrations such as attending church every Sunday, celebrating Easter, and "not dancing for forty days" when someone died.

Tatiana was the easiest child to get to know when I began my study. She warmed up to me quickly, and I to her. The second day of the study, she came to the back table where I was seated, while the other children were reading and eating their snack, and showed me a squirrel's tail that her father had found in the woods and given to her. We had a small discussion about it. "Was the squirrel eaten by an owl?" "I wonder what happened to it?" I queried, and she gave me her opinions. The fourth day, she came to the back table to show me a photo album of herself and family in both Romania and Canada. True to her talkative and outgoing self, she explained every picture to me. These visits became a daily occurrence; she would come to the back table to greet me when I arrived in the classroom while the other students would stay in their desks. This greeting included a big hug part way through the study.

During snack time when most students were reading, Tatiana would visit with those around her. A sociable and energetic girl, if she had the day off school she would choose to visit friends in Swan Hills, play on the computer, watch TV and play outside. She was not motivated to work hard at school. She mentioned that she would rather play outside, or do art than school work. Home reading was not a priority, nor was choosing to read during class time. Tatiana was seldom at a loss for words. During the structured interview, I asked all the children if they had ever done anything that other people were surprised that they could do. Tatiana immediately described in detail to me how she could toss a small candy up into the air and catch it in her mouth. She surprised a friend when she did this, and, she added, she was better at this trick than her brother was. Tatiana contributed often to the class discussions, and her comments were lively and insightful.

In her guided reading group, often the aide, Irene, and Tatiana would carry on a conversation while the other children in the group listened. She sometimes said things in a joking manner; her brown eyes dancing. She would flash an engaging smile when she thought she might have given an incorrect answer. Tatiana knew how to charm those around her. Because Tatiana was so easily accepted by others, she was not afraid to speak her mind, express her uncertainties and give her opinion. If others were surprised by her responses, she would smile, shrug and laugh at herself.

Kenton

Kenton, the youngest of five children, was born in Canada to Chinese parents. Being the youngest, he was exposed to English by his older siblings, but the language most often spoken at home was Cantonese. Kenton's father was learning English at work, and sometimes he came home and asked his children what certain words meant. Kenton's mother, on the other hand, knew very few English words. When Kenton started kindergarten, he did not speak English, although he said he understood some of the English language spoken around him. He told me that he started speaking English when he got to school at the age of four or five. Kenton's family appeared to be slowly adopting a Canadian way of life, while still holding on to some Chinese traditions. For

instance, the family celebrated Chinese New Year, but the children also had an Easter egg hunt at Easter time. The names of the children in the family reflect the gradual shift to "being" Canadian: Kenton's brother, the oldest in the family and in his late teens, has a Chinese name, which is the name he uses. His sisters have Chinese names, but are called by their English names. Kenton (although his name is changed for this study) has an English name, and does not know his Chinese name, or if he has one. The family eats traditional Chinese food, but occasionally eats hamburgers and pizza. Kenton's parents watch a Chinese channel on television and speak Cantonese at meal times while their children speak English. When the children speak to their parents, however, they speak in Cantonese. Immigrant families sometimes have a desire to keep the home language active so children attend language classes, often on the weekend. Kenton does not attend a class such as this, but is very aware that his friend Todd, another child in this study, does attend language classes. When I interviewed the two boys at the end of the study, Kenton volunteered, "I don't go to Chinese school. He (referring to Todd) goes to Chinese school, I don't." Kenton's ability to speak Cantonese is hard for me to discern. He told me that he spoke a lot of Cantonese at home, but on a different occasion admitted that his ability to understand the language is better than his ability to speak it. The family sometimes phones relatives in China, and Kenton speaks to them in Cantonese. Kenton also noted that there were Chinese books in his home, which he sometimes tried to read, but "only like a few words from each book."

Kenton did not refer much to his learning of English, but one day he made a comment that I found interesting. We discussed the guided reading group at the end of the study, and how the talk that occurred in the group helped with understanding. Kenton, out of the blue, commented, "Well, when I was like a baby, I was just talking this language, and then another language. And then when I got to school, it was English!" I responded, "Right. What was that like for you?" "Well, weird," Kenton replied. I do not know why he referred to "another language" except that he briefly referred to learning French in playschool. However, my sense was that he knew a language (Cantonese) and perhaps, through language, was beginning to make sense of his world. Then he started

school, and suddenly his world was turned upside down because everyone around him was speaking a language he did not know, or at least know well enough to understand. Kenton's comment could also be interpreted to mean that when he got to school, he realized that the other language he had heard was English, but at the time that he made this particular comment, I did not take this meaning. I got the feeling that starting school was a confusing, "weird" time for Kenton.

Kenton was wary of me at first. When I walked by him or watched what he was doing, he seemed apprehensive but also pleased that he was getting the attention. When he realized that I was not going to criticize or evaluate him, that I was just there to observe, he relaxed in my presence. Kenton was very interested in, and observant of, what was going on around him. When the students were reading and eating their morning snack, Kenton was an active participant in the conversations that went on around him. Sometimes he would initiate talk with a boy who sat across from him, or with the boy sitting next to him, and just as often students would initiate talk with Kenton. When students around him were quiet, Kenton would attentively read. When there was a distraction, Kenton would look up, observe and sometimes become a part of the interchange. Kenton's seat was at the back of the class close to the "purple" guided reading group. While this group was in progress, the students who were not in a reading group (of which Kenton was one) were to be working quietly at their desks either on a written assignment, or reading. When the discussion got interesting in the purple reading group, Kenton would often stop what he was doing and listen with interest. He was very aware and curious about what was going on around him.

Kenton was a student eager to please the teacher, and well aware of the "rules" of the class. When the new student, Cam, joined their reading group, Kenton would observe what Cam was doing, and correct him on the procedures if need be. When the teacher asked questions of the group, Kenton would try to answer, even if he was unsure of his answer. This eagerness to please carried over to the home environment. When I asked Kenton what he would do if he had the day off school, he replied that he would help his Mom "wash the dishes and do chores." When I asked what else he would do, he replied

that he would play with his brothers and sisters. They would play outside, or play board games or video games. I was left with the impression of a boy who is, quite simply put, a 'good' boy.

The only time I saw Kenton exasperated was when he was asked to write something, and he would often be at a loss for ideas. These tasks were usually set as independent work while other guided reading groups were in progress. Kenton would sit with an empty paper in front of him, and whisper to himself, "I don't know what to write!" He would play with articles in his desk, draw on the corners of his paper, make a half-hearted attempt at writing, look around the room, and whisper again in frustration, "I don't know what to write!" Finally, Kenton would start his writing at the end of the twenty-minute independent work time, but it was evident that this was a frustrating task for him. I spoke with his Grade 2 teacher about this occurrence, and she nodded emphatically. "Oh yes, Kenton needs a *lot* of talk and explanation before he can write." Her opinion was that Kenton needed to be reassured that he was doing the assignment correctly, and that he understood what was required. He also needed the talk beforehand to build his vocabulary for writing. I realized that Kenton's need for reassurance probably explained his constant observing and checking of the activities of those around him. Not only was Kenton interested in the happenings around him, he was likely reassuring himself that he was doing the correct thing; that he was part of the social milieu around him; that he fit in.

Todd

Todd was the older of two sons, born in Canada to Vietnamese parents. Todd's father had learned some English at work, but his mother did not know or speak English. Todd spoke Chinese at home with his parents, but told me that he was also learning to speak Vietnamese. He attended a language class on the weekends to retain his home language; however, an interview revealed that he was learning Chinese at these classes. Todd spoke English with his five-year old brother with whom he appeared to have a close

relationship because he told me that he often read to his little brother and that he liked to play with him.

I tried to get a sense of the family's culture and traditions that were practiced. Todd told me that they sometimes put up a Christmas tree, and that they watch the fireworks on New Year's Eve. When I asked Todd if his family ate Vietnamese food, he replied "no." When I asked what food they ate, he replied that they ate noodles, rice, meat and fish. The family had been to visit Vietnam twice, once when Todd was four, and once when he was seven. He had relatives who lived in Canada and relatives in Vietnam. When with relatives, and when in Vietnam, Todd told me that he spoke Chinese, but that he started to learn Vietnamese on the last trip to Vietnam. I commented that knowing two or more languages was a good thing, and that I wished I knew more than one language. Todd did not hold this view, and told me "no" he did not think that knowing another language was good for him. On one occasion I asked him to say something in Cantonese, and he said he was too "embarrassed" to use his home language.

When Todd began Kindergarten, he told me that he did not speak English, although he said that "I understanded a little." I talked briefly with his kindergarten teacher, and she remembered that Todd did not understand English when he arrived at school. When I asked Todd what that was like, to come to school and not know the language being spoken, Todd replied, "shy." Todd thought that he learned English by listening to what other people said. He said that he knew English well by the time he got to Grade 1.

Todd is a quiet, introspective boy. He was the most difficult to get to know of the three focal children. Glasses were perched on his nose, and when asked a question, he often crinkled up his nose as he looked thoughtfully at the questioner, simultaneously thinking and pushing his glasses up. I got the sense that there was a lot going on in his head, but those thought processes were not often shared. If Todd had an answer, he often did not volunteer it. Instead, he preferred to keep answers to himself, and had to be asked specifically for a response. Occasionally though, he would surprise you with a

volunteered response. When he was asked, he would opt for a short answer in a soft-spoken voice, or give no response at all, as in this interchange:

Teacher (to Todd):	Did you give your Mom something? [She is referring to Mother's Day.]
Todd:	(he nods)
Teacher:	What did you give her?
Todd:	(answer is so soft, it is unclear)
Teacher:	Was is something she needed or wanted?
Todd:	(nods)

Todd was especially reticent to talk about topics that were personal. He was more likely to give responses that were about the book being read, or he could often be heard backing up a response from Kenton, by his "Yeah!" There were times during guided reading when Todd did seem engaged and willing to contribute to the conversation. At these times, he would contribute an answer, but often with an inflection at the end of the response, as if he was checking to see if he was right. More will be said about this occurrence in later chapters.

During the morning snack time, Todd was often reading when those around him were talking. He did not partake in the snack which may explain his total engrossment in his book; that is, while others were eating they were also talking. Todd was not eating, so could concentrate on his reading. Occasionally he would look up if he heard his name called, or if something was loud enough to break his concentration. But he usually had his nose in a book, often a non-fiction book, deep in concentration. Math was a favorite subject, and he seemed to enjoy learning about Science and nature. Despite his quiet, studious nature, Todd was popular among his classmates. He often played soccer with many other boys at recess time, and he told me that he had five or six friends. Todd was a helpful boy. One day in the computer lab, he helped another girl find the correct icon to access the page the class was working on. Like Kenton, if Todd had the day off of school, he told me that he would "help my family and play with my little brother." Helping his

family turned out to be helping his mom with the laundry. Todd was always respectful and polite to others.

It was obvious that Todd and Kenton enjoyed a close friendship. They sat beside each other during guided reading, helped each other during independent work time, and often agreed with each other's comments. Todd could not think of something he had done that surprised other people, or something good about being his age. An easy response for Todd was to say he did not know, he could not think of anything, or to simply not answer. This may give the impression of a little boy who may be sulky or unwilling to cooperate, but Todd was neither. Instead, he was good-natured and very pleasant to be around. He was quiet to the point of being shy, and concerned about giving a correct answer.

The reading events I observed were guided reading and whole class read-alouds. I will describe each of these events in greater detail next.

The Guided Reading Groups

There were four guided reading groups in Wynn's classroom. Two took place from 9:55 until 10:15, and two more from 10:15 until 10:35 at which time the recess bell rang. In order to accommodate many children reading with the support of an adult, the teacher conducted one reading group, and an aide or an available teacher came into the classroom to conduct one of the other guided reading groups during each time slot. The purpose of this initiative was to have students in all four guided reading groups reading with support every day.

I focused on two of the guided reading groups: the group with Tatiana, which took place in the first time slot (the purple group) and Todd and Kenton's group which occurred in the second time slot (the orange group). I will describe what typically occurred in the reading groups next.

Wynn usually led the orange reading group which was comprised of Kenton and Todd as well as two native English speakers, Angela and Cam, and another ELL student, Samantha. She was a Grade 2 student who joined this group for reading because she was

able to read books at the same level of difficulty as these Grade 3 students. I initially planned to include Samantha in my study because she met the criteria of an ELL student. However, I later decided that I would not include her because she was not a part of the daily classroom community.

Irene often led the purple reading group under the supervision of Wynn. In addition to Tatiana, the group consisted of three children who were native English speakers: two boys, Darren and Michael, and a girl, Brenda. Brenda was often absent, and when present, she was a quiet participant in the group. The boys periodically answered Irene's questions, or offered a personal experience story. Compared to the boys, Tatiana dominated the discussion most of the time because of her outgoing and verbal nature.

Wynn and Irene maintained order in the guided reading groups with strict rules for conduct. For instance, children had to raise their hand if they had something to say. Students were also required to read quietly or do an activity while the adult was reading with one of the students. Wynn and Irene controlled discussion by asking a question, and then selecting a student to respond, as in the excerpt below from the orange group:

Wynn:	Why do you think Callum says he isn't good at sports?
Cam:	Um-m-m-m. [This is ignored; he doesn't have his hand up.]
Wynn:	What do you think, Kenton?
Kenton:	He never played sports before...?
Wynn:	Maybe he never played enough sports. Maybe people teased him. What did you say, Angela?

Although this pattern of interaction limited spontaneous responses, all children were encouraged to participate. After a student responded, Wynn would often repeat the response, and then ask the next student in the group for his or her answer. These rules were constantly reinforced for the benefit of the new student, Cam, who regularly blurted out comments or interrupted the conversation between Wynn and the student she was reading with at the time. He had not yet internalized the rules of interaction. Wynn would

ignore his response, or remind him that he needed to raise his hand. On occasion, Cam was sent to his desk to read alone because he had not followed this rule.

Irene appeared to enjoy conversing with the students, especially Tatiana, during guided reading time. She seemed to vacillate between maintaining control by requesting that children raise their hands, and then forgetting this directive when the conversation got interesting. She would often switch topics if the students initiated this, and was sincerely interested in what they had to say. A brief discussion with her revealed her excitement about genuine student interaction. She relayed to me a story from the previous year, and she concluded:

> Irene: I was just thrilled with the conversation we had with that. And because of that interaction and conversation that I...especially with small groups that I hate to go with OK, hands up, kind of thing. Because you miss out on that kind of thing! That interaction and that flow. And yet you occasionally get two of them talking at once.

The children in the orange group read a variety of texts over the two-month period of my study. Nine books were read in total, including texts that were fiction, informational, a birthday planning book and legends. Approximately one week was spent on each book. Wynn introduced each new book in a similar manner: she asked the children to look at the cover, the students read the teaser, or synopsis, on the back of the book, and then the teaser was read aloud together. Discussion often ensued which activated the students' prior knowledge, or piqued their curiosity about the contents of the book. Wynn often set a purpose before the students began reading a portion of the text. For example, before reading one book, Wynn asked the students to "think about the things that are magic in this story...because sometimes when we read a legend or a myth or a fairytale, there's magic."

When I began my study, the students in the purple group were reading a book of poems, which took almost three weeks to complete. After the poetry book was completed, the students read three non-fiction books: the first was about an older woman

(Grandma Moses) in the United States who became famous because of her paintings, the second was about sea animals, and the last was about hospital workers. Each of the non-fiction books took about two weeks to complete. Irene began each reading session differently, depending on what was being read. When the students were reading from the poetry book, Irene started the guided reading session by asking the students whose turn it was to read. One of the students would read the poem aloud, and then they would discuss it. For example, one session began like this:

Irene: We're going to go on to the second poem. So, if everyone goes to page 6 please. Brenda, come join us.

Tatiana: I didn't read yesterday.

Irene: Yeah, it's a girl's turn to read today.

Irene introduced the non-fiction books by going through a list of vocabulary words, and on occasion, she asked a question that activated the students' prior knowledge.

During and after reading, Wynn had a selection of activities that the children could do. For example, they may have been asked to draw a bubble map about a character, to draw a flow map to illustrate the sequence of events in the text (See Appendix 3 for a description of thinking maps), or to answer one or two questions that Wynn thought of and wrote on a paper in the center of the reading table. The group would then discuss the questions after all students had completed reading a section of the text.

With the exception of the poetry book, Irene asked the students to complete the three comprehension questions found at the end of the other texts, at their desks. She would go over the meaning of the questions with the students before they were required to complete them. The possible answers to the questions were not discussed until after the students had completed them independently.

Whole Class Read-Alouds

Over the course of the two months, there were six whole class read-alouds that I observed and recorded. Three of the read-alouds took place the first week of April, two

the second week of April, and then one read-aloud in May. One of the read-alouds was done by an Aboriginal woman who visited the school regularly to share Aboriginal stories. Wynn chose a variety of books for the other five read-alouds including a legend, a folktale, a book each by Robert Munsch and Patricia Polacco, and some poetry. Although Wynn believed that reading aloud to children is important, she felt that there simply was not time to engage in read-alouds as often as she wanted. End of year activities, such as preparing for provincial examinations, as well as special events such as field trips and sports days, made demands on available school time.

Wynn's introduction to the read-aloud book was much the same as her introduction to new books in the guided reading group. She would read the title, discuss any unfamiliar words or concepts in the title, activate prior knowledge, and then read the story aloud. For instance, before Wynn read *Moira's Birthday* (Munsch, 1987) she asked the students to share instances when they have had fun. A book by Patricia Polacco prompted a discussion of this author and the beautiful illustrations. Throughout the reading, she would stop and discuss unfamiliar vocabulary, or ask questions to prompt thinking. "Worrywort" was a word that occurred in one of the books, and Wynn stopped reading to ask, "So a worrywort is a person who...?" She then reread the passage in the book that gave clues to the meaning so that the students understood "worrywort." During the reading of *Rechenka's Eggs* (Polacco, 1988) Wynn asked the students to interpret the look on the goose's face: "Look at the goose. What kind of look does the goose have on her face? Can you describe this look?" On one occasion, Wynn set a purpose for reading, ("I'll tell you what I want you to listen for."), and on another occasion, she asked the children for their predictions ("What do you think will happen?").

The class as a whole listened avidly to the stories read aloud. They contributed to the discussion about the book, and often responded aesthetically to events by laughing, or by commenting about an event in the book. Read-aloud time was a popular activity in this Grade 3 classroom.

I observed, tape recorded, and took notes about the whole class read-alouds, but in retrospect, the guided reading sessions were much more valuable. The smaller-group

format of guided reading provided richer opportunities for Tatiana, Kenton and Todd to speak, and to get responses for their contributions. Therefore, my analysis and interpretation will only be of the guided reading events.

Data Analysis and Interpretation: Cummins' Framework

Case study research claims no particular methods for data analysis. For this reason, analysis of case study evidence can be the most difficult aspect of doing a case study (Yin, 2003). My job after data collection was to search for some kind of coherence, "to lay out [my] best guesses" (Dyson and Genishi, 2005, p. 79). My role as qualitative researcher was to observe the everyday activities and workings of the case, and to interpret the words and actions of the participants.

Analysis means taking something apart (Stake, 1995); however, the qualitative researcher must also put the instance back together again to find meaning. Field notes, interview transcripts, the reading event transcripts and the texts that were read now needed to be woven together to construct my case. I needed to rely on my own rigorous thinking to tackle this enormous task, and to be inductive and reflexive to arrive at my "assertions" (Stake, 1995; Dyson & Genishi, 2005). "As pieces of data are organized and compared, as their variable natures are identified and named (or coded), as their interrelationships are examined, the researcher uncovers new spaces—new holes—in the developing portrait of the case..." (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 81). At the forefront of my thinking was the purpose of the study: to try to gain insight into the experiences of ELL students during reading events.

Unlike literature circles or book clubs where students interact freely with one another about the text read, the guided reading group and whole class read-alouds were led and structured by the teacher. She controlled who had the right to speak and what the topic of conversation would be. As I read through my notes and transcripts, I asked, what did the teacher say, and what did the ELL students say or do in response? When was there a response, and conversely, when was there silence? What contexts appeared to support meaning-making for ELL students? When was discourse used as a scaffold by

the teacher, and when was discourse used as a scaffold by other students? When did the words spoken appear to affect meaning for the ELL student?

I also took note of when the talk became collaborative and children appeared to be engaged with their learning. Wells (2001) is convinced that "the most valuable talk occurs in the context of exploration of events and ideas in which alternative accounts and explanations are considered and evaluated (p. 4)." He writes of dialogic responsivity which occurs during face-to-face discussion where the understanding we achieve builds on the contributions of others. It is at the heart of knowledge building (Wells, 1998). I was interested in the knowledge-building community of the guided reading group, and so all participants and their contributions to discussion played a crucial role. The responses and actions of the native English speakers in the group were a meaningful contrast to the English language learners. Finally, the interactions particular to this social group were important, so I looked for themes that reflected the social aspect of meaning making. "The researcher's purpose is not merely to organize data but to try to identify and gain analytic insight into the dimensions and dynamics of the phenomenon being studied" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 81).

Analysis began for me as I transcribed what I had heard during reading events. Patterns emerged as I mulled over the meanings of what I heard, read, and typed. After the transcriptions were complete, I repeatedly read over my data and began with open-coding of my field notes by labeling what happened during each reading event. The interviews served to confirm and broaden my understanding of the reading events. I also paid attention to what the teacher said and did, and the subsequent responses of the students. From the labeling process, I looked for relevant information and recurrent patterns, and from these I created categories, such as: activation of background knowledge, teaching vocabulary, asking questions and the teaching of reading strategies. When I looked at the teacher-student interaction, I coded instances when, for instance, the teacher was in tune with a student's intended meaning, and when she asked for an elaborated response. I also made note of when students did not respond, when their responses were short, or when the response ended with an inflection. I highlighted

instances when a student shared a personal experience, or made a connection with the text. As I reflected on my analysis, I realized that my question had shifted slightly from how ELL students use oral language to construct meaning, to what contexts supported mean-making. This shift was, in part, due to the guided reading events that I observed, which required the teacher to lead the discussion.

My analysis and interpretation were shaped by the literature and by my data. Cummins (2001) suggests that academic language, or CALP (described in detail in Chapter 2), can be developed through instruction that has a focus on meaning, a focus on language (how language works), and by providing opportunities for students to express themselves, which he termed a focus on use. At the center of his instructional framework is the interaction between the teacher and student, or the interpersonal space that Vygotsky (1934/1986) termed the zone of proximal development. I decided that Cummins' framework provided terminology that could describe broad categories in my data. His framework also provided me with a way to organize and report my findings. Each component: a focus on meaning, a focus on language, and a focus on use, with teacher-student interaction at the heart of the framework, will be described in further detail next.

A Focus on Meaning

Meaning is at the heart of communication, especially for students who are attempting to understand a new language. Cummins (2001), however, stresses the importance of going beyond literal comprehension. He suggests that teacher-student interactions can reach deeper levels of cognitive and linguistic processing by encouraging students to "share and amplify their experience" (2001, p. 134), a notion that echoes Rosenblatt's (1989) aesthetic response to text. Cummins suggests five phases of interaction: the experiential, the literal, the personal, the critical, and the creative. The experiential phase is when the teacher activates, or builds on prior knowledge. The literal phase is a focus on information contained in the text, while the third phase, the personal, is when the teacher asks students to relate the text to their own experience and feelings.

The critical phase is when students critically analyze information in the text, and the creative phase is when students move from the text to concrete action.

A Focus on Language

The second area of instruction, a focus on language, is meant to demystify how academic language works, and to develop an awareness of language. This is accomplished through vocabulary work, and by attention to how language is used in particular social situations, and in particular texts (Cummins, 2001). Development of language awareness is important for language minority students to help them become knowledgeable members of mainstream society (Delpit, 1988). Vocabulary instruction was a regular part of the guided reading event. I used Beck, McKeown and Kucan's (2002) discussion of effective vocabulary instruction, and their suggestion that words have different levels of utility to code the instances in my data when vocabulary was introduced. I looked at vocabulary instruction in the reading groups in terms of selecting which words to teach, and how to teach their meaning.

A Focus on Use

The last component, a focus on use, is the notion that students need opportunities to express themselves in authentic ways, otherwise "L2 acquisition will remain abstract and classroom-bound (Cummins, 2001, p. 144)." I looked for instances when students used language to express themselves to an authentic audience; when talk became collaborative and there was negotiation of meaning. "Language use can stimulate linguistic growth, cognitive development, and affirmation of identity (2001, p. 144)." Often this occurred in concert with questioning. The teacher asked questions as a regular part of guided reading, and questions required a response from students. I found the work of Skidmore, Perez-Parent and Arnfield (2003) useful to further categorize questions asked in the reading groups as: questions with one right answer, questions with a finite set of answers, and questions with no set answer.

Teacher-student Interactions

At the center of Cummins' (2001) framework is the interpersonal space created in the interactions between teachers and students, or the place "where knowledge is generated and identities are negotiated (p. 125)." As mentioned in chapter 2, these interactions are never neutral, but reflect or challenge the power relations of the wider society. ELL students are successful at school if they are cognitively engaged as well as respected and valued, which in turn leads to a positive self-concept. "A starting point in the framework is the assertion that the learning process must be observed through the twin lens of cognitive engagement and identity investment" (Cummins, 2001, p. 126). I looked at teacher-student interactions in relation to cultural identity and a sense of belonging. The work of Cummins (2000, 2001, 2006) informed my analysis, as did the work of Gee (1996), Heath (1983), Moll (1990, 1994), and Toohey (2000), all of whom emphasize the importance of the social and cultural in a person's identity.

This category also reflects the significance of Vygotsky's (1934/1986) notion that we acquire meaning through social interaction, within the zone of proximal development, where a knowledgeable person provides some type of instructional support. I looked for instances when the teacher provided scaffolds that supported both literacy and language learning.

All of the categories attempt to capture the dynamics of the guided reading session by considering the cognitive, social and cultural dimensions of the group. For instance, questioning could be considered a cognitive task, but within this category there are acceptable ways of speaking and interacting (the social dimension), and participants bring unique identities to the group (the cultural dimension). For the purpose of data reporting, I have tried to quote transcripts that illustrate a category; however, the categories overlap and are interrelated. In addition, due to the complexity of classroom talk, many dimensions are working at once.

I will report and analyze my data which appear in the following chapters under the broad categories of: a focus on meaning, a focus on vocabulary, a focus on use, and cultural identity and a sense of belonging.

CHAPTER 5
A FOCUS ON MEANING

Cummins' (2001) developed a framework that aims to develop academic language. The framework consists of a focus on meaning, a focus on language and a focus on use, with teacher-student interactions at the center. I used his framework to analyze my data, and I begin to report my findings with the category of "a focus on meaning." I commence with a discussion of background knowledge and describe the categories that emerged from each group, followed by the text specific knowledge that Wynn provided to the students.

Students who are learning a new language must be able to understand most of what they hear, termed comprehensible input (Cummins, 2001). However, to develop academic language, Cummins recommends that comprehensible input go beyond literal comprehension to interactions that promote critical literacy. This can be accomplished through five phases of teacher-student interactions, described previously in Chapter 4: the experiential, the literal, the personal, the critical and the creative. "This implies a process whereby students relate textual and instructional meanings to their own experience and prior knowledge, critically analyze the information in the text, and use the results of their discussions and analyses in some concrete, intrinsically-motivating activity or project" (Cummins, 2001, p. 133). Conventional reading instruction has tended to focus only on the literal phase, which reflects a transmission model of teaching and learning. Attention to the other phases invites a deeper engagement with text, and talk about texts helps students internalize and more fully comprehend academic language (Cummins, 2001).

The experiential, literal and personal phases were evident in my data, whereas the critical and creative phases were less so. Cummins (2001) suggests that building on or activating background knowledge (the experiential phase) is vitally important for comprehension. When students relate the text to their own knowledge and experience, for example, depth of understanding of concepts and vocabulary is fostered. In this chapter, I report the excerpts pertaining to background knowledge with my interpretation and the research literature. I then report instances when the teacher pointed out aspects of the text

that helped with comprehension, or "text-specific knowledge" which I see as related to Cummins' literal phase. The personal phase, when students related textual information to their own experiences and feelings, overlapped with background knowledge and questioning. Therefore, the personal phase is mentioned as it arose when activating background knowledge, but personal responses to the text are discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

Background Knowledge

Background knowledge is one of the most important factors influencing students' ability to comprehend a text (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Cummins, 2001). Readers integrate new knowledge into existing cognitive structures (Cummins, 2001). The research suggests that background knowledge is an important consideration when working with ELL students (Anderson & Roit, 1996; Cummins, 2001; Fitzgerald & Graves, 2004). ELL students may have a rich repertoire of background knowledge but may not be versed in the cultural knowledge or concepts required to understand an English text. Therefore, activating and building on background knowledge acts as a support to understand a text.

Activating background knowledge was a common practice of the teacher in this classroom. I looked carefully at these interactions and noted that the responses of the ELL students revealed different levels of participation depending on their background knowledge. The excerpts reported below indicate that discussion about a topic brings to consciousness prior knowledge, and that discussion reveals whether or not ELL students have background knowledge about a topic. The data also revealed that, understandably, when ELL students have background knowledge they are better able to participate in the discussion, but when they did not have background knowledge, they were unable to participate and be a part of the community of readers.

Wynn engaged the students in many activities to build background knowledge before reading a text. In the following example, when the group began a book about a legend from Ireland, Wynn reviewed the meaning of legend, showed the students Ireland

on a globe, asked students to share what they remembered about this country, and then invited comments about what the students knew about mermaids. A portion of the conversation is transcribed below:

Wynn:	Now, I see in the story there is a mermaid. Can you tell me what you know about a mermaid? Samantha?
Samantha:	Usually they have a green tail…?
Wynn:	Angela?
Angela:	It's part human and part fish…?
Wynn:	Do you know anything else about a mermaid?
Kenton:	It lives in the water…?
Wynn:	Cam?
Cam:	Mermaids…um…you can't sing…well, they actually don't talk, they sing. But outside of the water, it hurts your ears, but inside it's beautiful.
Wynn:	Beautiful singing? OK. Well, that sounds like something to keep in your mind when you read this book.

All of the students clearly had some background knowledge about mermaids evidenced by their responses. The opportunity to share what they knew brought to consciousness their background knowledge in preparation for reading the legend. The discussion about Ireland, legends, and mermaids made the text context embedded, an element of Cummins' (2001) framework that is important for ELL students' understanding.

Irene tapped into the students' background knowledge by asking questions during reading, such as, "How many of you have done that?" or "Who has ever eaten lobster?" Tatiana was an outgoing participant who often shared her background knowledge even when not invited to do so. Before reading a book about hospital workers, Irene asked, "So, who do you guys think works in a hospital?" Tatiana answered the question and extended her response by sharing a personal story about visiting a relative who had just given birth to a baby:

Tatiana: and I wanted to see the baby but actually, my brother was the only one who could go, I had to stay, because you had to be over 12.

Irene: To go see the baby. Oh! That's too bad.

Tatiana: Yeah. And um I saw, um a person, I don't know...a garbage man was working there, and um a manager girl that uh, sweeps the floors and uh...

Darren: The janitor.

Irene: Custodian, or janitor, right, just like Mr. P. is. [Mr. P. is the janitor at this school.]

Tatiana: Mmmhmm.

Irene: So, you had to wait in a waiting area. You couldn't go see the baby, hey?

Tatiana: uh um-m. No, I couldn't. There was two kids over there, so I just stayed and two times I went and looked at them. They were teaching me fish [the card game], a girl and a boy.

Tatiana was able to activate her background knowledge and often made personal connections to the text which she was willing to share with her peers.

Building Background Knowledge

When the students began a book about bowling, Wynn soon realized through discussion that Kenton and Todd had little experience with this activity. She then built upon their knowledge by explicitly explaining terminology and the rules of the game.

Wynn: So, let's take a look at the cover of this book. Tell me what you see on the cover.

Cam: Uh, bowling pins.

Wynn: What do you see, Kenton?

Kenton: Bowling pins and a bowling ball.

Wynn: Ummhmm. What's this thing that you bowl down? Do you know what that's called?

Kenton:	(no reply)
Wynn:	That space where everybody has to bowl down. Everybody has to bowl in their own space, right? Have you gone bowling before?
Kenton:	Ye-e-e-s. ..Once...
Wynn:	Just a second, when everybody goes bowling you bowl in your own space, and you bowl down this long:...?
Cam:	Line
Wynn:	Do you know what it is called? Do you know?
Angela:	A bowling alley.
Wynn:	An *alley*. You bowl down an *alley*, right? Now, there's different kinds of bowling. Kenton, what kind of bowling did you do?
Kenton:	Um, I forgot.

What began as activating background knowledge changed to building on that knowledge for Kenton and Todd. Although both boys responded that they had gone bowling, I wondered about that experience when both boys were reluctant to respond to Wynn's questions about the details of bowling. Did the boys simply forget the experience, or were they attempting to be a part of the group by saying that they had gone bowling?

In an interview the next day with the boys, I learned that they had gone on a field trip to a bowling alley in Grade 1 (two years previously), but that they had not gone bowling since, which would explain their uncertainty with Wynn's questions. I also noted that their bowling experience was something done with fellow classmates as a school activity. Some of the native English speakers, in contrast, had gone bowling as an event with their families. Perhaps bowling was not an activity of choice for these boys and their families.

The interview also revealed that Kenton and Todd had gained new knowledge about bowling as a result of the discussion. Todd specifically said, "I learned that the place where you bowl is called the bowling alley." Kenton added, "If you hit all the pins, it's called a strike. If you hit some pins, and then you knock them all down, it's called a spare." The discussion before reading served two purposes: the teacher became aware of

gaps in knowledge, and the ensuing discussion served as a support to build knowledge about bowling, which enabled the students to make meaning from the text.

At one point during the study, Wynn commented that, "these students lack background knowledge...they just don't seem to do anything on the weekends." This comment may appear brusque, but she intended no slight to her students. She was referring to what she saw as the circumstances of many of the students who attended this school. Lack of resources prohibited many of these children from doing activities that children in other socioeconomic circumstances might do with their families, such as visiting a museum, swimming or bowling. Many families were focused on meeting their daily needs, so the luxury of excursions and family outings were not a part of their daily life. Often they spent weekends around the family home or apartment--watching television, playing outside, or visiting with relatives. At the same time, they may have been engaging in a number of fruitful activities that were not recognized in the school.

Wynn was referring to all students in her class, but certainly the lack of family excursions and pursuits seemed true for Kenton and Todd, and, to a lesser extent, Tatiana. I make this observation because during whole class discussions when children shared their weekend activities, Kenton and Todd noticeably lacked experience with events considered "common" among children in Canada, such as playing at the playground or riding a bicycle. For example, during a whole class discussion one day in early spring, Wynn asked the students about their plans for the weekend. One native English speaker said that she was going to ride her bike. Talk and excitement about bikes followed her comment and then Wynn asked the students who owned bikes. Many children raised their hands with the exception of both Kenton and Todd. They were not a part of this excitement. Bowling, riding bikes, and going to the playground can be considered cultural activities among Canadian children; whereas, Kenton and Todd may engage in activities considered common practice in their culture. What those activities might be I can only guess at, because I noticed this as I analyzed my data, and so missed the opportunity to talk to the boys about popular family activities. The point here is that the

conversation excluded Kenton and Todd; they were quiet observers of the shared experiences of their classmates, which will be discussed in more detail next.

Background Knowledge and Participation

When the ELL students had background knowledge about the topic of discussion, the pattern of interaction changed in that they were better able to participate. In the following excerpt, Wynn had asked the students what they have to do to get ready for a party. Todd raised his hand to volunteer an answer, and Kenton spontaneously responded to the teacher's question.

Wynn:	What do you have to do to get ready for a party?
Todd:	You have to have cake.
Wynn:	Oh! You have to have cake. Right. Kenton?
Kenton:	You have to have birthday hats.
Wynn:	Oh! You have to have birthday hats. If this is a birthday party of course. Angela?
Angela:	Sometimes people give gift bags, when they leave, and they give them a gift bag with a whole bunch of stuff in it.
Wynn:	Let's pretend it is a birthday party. What else do you need to organize for a party?
Todd:	[puts his hand up to volunteer an answer] Balloons.
Wynn:	OK. Balloons are always good. What do you *do* at a birthday party?
Kenton:	Oh! You play games with your friends and eat cake.

Unlike the earlier excerpt that indicated Todd and Kenton did not have experience with bowling, this excerpt shows that the boys were able to volunteer answers because birthday parties were a part of their background knowledge. In the bowling excerpt, Kenton seemed to withdraw and become unsure of himself with the realization that he did not know about bowling. In contrast, the boys were eager contributors to this conversation about birthday parties. As Cummins (2001) suggests, cognitive engagement

and identity investment are reciprocal; when students feel affirmed, they are more likely to be cognitively engaged. When they are engaged, they are using language to share experiences and make connections with the text.

Students from diverse backgrounds will have prior knowledge that varies widely; therefore, they have the potential for bringing a rich repertoire of experiences to the classroom. One day, the students in the reading group were looking at a picture of people in a rice field, and they were unsure of what the picture depicted. Kenton volunteered that the people were using baskets to hold the rice. Wynn asked how he knew that, and he mentioned that his father used to work in the rice paddies.

Wynn:	Did he tell you that?
Kenton:	Yeah.
Wynn:	And did he pick it by hand?
Kenton:	Yeah, cause there was no machines there to pick it up...put it in baskets.
Wynn:	What did they do with it after they put it in the basket? Do you know what they do with it?
Kenton:	Uh...I don't know.
Wynn:	I don't know much about rice and how it grows.

It appears that Kenton had been told stories about his parents' life in China, and was able to explain the picture to his peers and teacher. When ELL students are invited to share their cultural knowledge, they become the 'expert,' and their background experiences are validated. Gonzalez and Moll (2002) call this "funds of knowledge," and the term is based on the premise that "people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (p. 625). Instruction, then, must be linked to students' lives, and the message is then conveyed that their cultural experiences are important (Cummins, 2001; Gonzalez & Moll, 2002).

Chamot (1998) notes that "Nowhere is the role of prior knowledge more important than in second language educational contexts." He adds that students may believe that they can only draw upon the knowledge learned in the second language, but

drawing upon knowledge in the first language and culture provides a rich array of experience. Other students can also benefit when cultural knowledge is shared. This knowledge is more likely to be tapped if books are selected that are relevant to the students' cultural backgrounds. When texts are chosen that are vastly different from the students' experience, it is much more difficult for them to relate to the contents. The books selected for this reading group included narratives that were within their realm of experience, such as bowling and birthday parties; whereas other books, such as the legends from Ireland and Australia, were far removed.

Personal Responses to Text

There were few instances in the guided reading groups when Kenton and Todd made a personal connection to the text by drawing upon their prior experience or knowledge. The excerpt about a birthday party shows that they were able to respond about concrete events, but did not make the leap to share personal aspects of their lives. In the same discussion about parties, Wynn asked a question that required a personal answer, and modeled a response.

> I want you to think of a really good party that you've been to, and maybe you can share why you thought this party was good. It can be any kind of celebration where people get together—birthday, Christmas, Halloween, whatever...Anybody want to start? (pause) I'll start. OK. I went to a New Year's Eve party once and it was really a lot of fun because there were different people there that I hadn't met before. I think it's nice to go to a party and meet some new people. Todd?

Todd looked up at the ceiling and did not answer. He was the first who was asked to answer, and may not have had enough think time. Samantha mentioned a holiday in China when there were "lots of dragons," and Angela described a birthday party she had attended at a movie theatre. Kenton's turn was next, and he too did not respond. It is hard to know why the boys did not to respond. I knew that they had attended birthday parties because of the earlier discussion. Perhaps the boys would have contributed if students had been able to answer when ready, instead of being nominated to answer. One might have

to spend time thinking about, firstly, a party they enjoyed, and secondly, why they enjoyed it. Although Wynn modeled a possible response (she enjoyed meeting new people), her response was from the point of view of an adult and not likely to be a child's answer. Children are more likely to enjoy games or food, and not be happy to have "met new people." Another possibility is that this kind of discourse was unfamiliar to them; Kenton and Todd may not have felt comfortable discussing why or why not they enjoyed a party. Although they did not engage in this particular conversation, they were exposed to possible responses. Ideally, however, one would want the boys to make personal connections to the text, and be able to share their feelings and opinions in order to develop their language proficiency and deepen their reading experience (Rosenblatt, 1994).

Tatiana, in contrast to the boys, was able to make personal connections to the text. She constantly made reference to her own experiences, whether the text was about cats, ("That's all I do with my cat."), sea life ("I saw a TV show about this fish"), or siblings, ("My brother caught a fish once…"). Tatiana's ability to personally connect with the text was at times humorous, as in the following excerpt. Irene had asked the students what an autograph book was, and she explained that sometimes friends write a verse:

Irene:	A lot of times we used to write "Roses are red, violets are blue, Sugar is sweet, and so are you." That was a very popular saying when I was young. And then they sign their name to it.
Tatiana:	Oh! Well, I saw, oh I saw at this um, on TV, it was on an episode of "The Sweet Life of Zach and Cody" and uh, their mom—
Irene:	Mmmhmm
Tatiana:	She was dating a guy and, and she found out that the guy lied. He wasn't, he—
Irene:	OK, is this relevant to this?
Tatiana:	Yeah, well, it's just that he said, and she said, "Violets are blue, Roses are red ... go soak your head."

The dialogue pertaining to background knowledge revealed different levels of participation for Kenton and Todd depending on their background knowledge; whereas Tatiana was able to participate and make personal connections regardless of her background knowledge.

Text-Specific Knowledge

Providing text-specific knowledge to fully understand the text is beneficial for ELL students (Fitzgerald & Graves, 2004) and ties into Cummins' (2001) conception of the literal phase of a focus on meaning. Giving students information about the topics, events, people or places covered can be much like a movie or television preview, which provides a valuable context for understanding what is to be viewed, or read.

Wynn drew attention to aspects of the text that helped with comprehension. For instance, she pointed out a small picture of a dog on the cover of a book, which meant that the book was non-fiction.

Wynn: What does that picture *mean*? That picture that's on the front cover at the bottom? What does that mean? (pause) What does it say?

Kenton: "Little Celebrations"] (spoken almost at the same time)

Todd: "Little Celebrations"]

Wynn: "Little Celebrations" and what other word?

Kenton and Todd: (together) "non-fiction"

Wynn: Non-fiction. So we know it's a (pause)...?

Todd: Real.

Wynn: A real book. It's a fact book.

Wynn also provided information so that students knew what to expect when reading a text. She would typically introduce a new text by reading the title and then the students would read the teaser on the back of the book together. At times, she would provide the students with an explanation that would help them to understand the text, as in the excerpt below:

> So this story comes from Australia, and the author went and talked to some Aboriginal people and they told her the stories, and she is retelling it. Before we even read the story, I'd like you turn to the yellow pages at the back of the book. [The students turn to the yellow pages. There is a picture of a woman]. This is a picture of Catherine Berndt with some Aboriginal people and she's collecting their stories. So she's probably using, I think probably a tape recorder...

She then directed the students to turn to the "yellow pages first" because they explained the symbolic illustrations in the book, and they read these pages together. By explaining the context for writing the book, the students started the text with a good base understanding of what the story was about.

In another instance, before reading a book where the characters talk to each other through email, Wynn provided this advance organizer:

> Read this section here that looks like email because Callum is emailing Pa and they email back and forth. So read this. There is always a "To" and a "From" and a "Subject" about what they are talking about, just like real email.

In this final example, Wynn explained the format of a book about planning a birthday party:

> Now in this book you're going to find a lot of little pictures and illustrations. You're going to find recipes that you might even want to use. And you're going to find crafts and games in this book. So, this book is very useful if you were going to plan a birthday party.

Wynn pointed out aspects of the text that were worthy of note, and in this way was helping her students become independent readers.

In summary, explicitly providing text specific information is important to help ELL students understand a text. Analysis of the data revealed that the ELL students may not talk about the knowledge or experience they needed to understand certain texts. The discussion that happened before reading a text was crucial for the teacher to find out what students knew, but the talk also brought to consciousness student knowledge, and helped them to learn from others about a topic. The bowling excerpt revealed how building on,

and activating prior knowledge became especially important for Kenton and Todd because they were not familiar with this activity. When the boys did have background knowledge, they became confident and active participants in the group, and in one instance Kenton had cultural knowledge of rice paddies that the others did not possess. An aspect of background knowledge that could receive more attention is an awareness of the rich array of knowledge and experience that ELL students bring to the classroom. There were few opportunities over the course of the study for the boys to contribute what they knew about their own culture. When students' background knowledge is affirmed, the students are seen as individuals with unique experiences, and teachers benefit by getting to know their students better.

Tatiana's ability to relate the text to her own experience was a strength, and her verbal nature allowed others in her group to benefit from her input. Whereas Tatiana needed an opportunity to express herself and her experiences in the guided reading group, Kenton and Todd needed discussion that activated or built upon their background knowledge in order to understand the text. Activating background knowledge made the language and concepts more meaningful to these students by enabling them to relate new information to what they already knew. However, the boys were seldom able to make personal connections with the text and their own background experience. Cummins (2001) suggests that the notion of meaning can be extended from a literal interpretation to a critical look at texts to promote a deeper level of cognitive and linguistic processing. Kenton and Todd appeared to lack confidence in their own opinions, and their responses were limited to a literal engagement with the text.

CHAPTER 6
A FOCUS ON VOCABULARY

One aspect of Cummins' (2001) focus on language component is to enable students to "harvest the language" (p. 139), so that they are able to use words in meaningful ways. This is accomplished by attention to how language is used in particular social situations (e.g. street language versus school language), in particular texts (e.g. poetry versus informational text), and through vocabulary work, to name just a few examples of a focus on language (Cummins, 2001). Many aspects of Cummins' focus on language were not apparent in the data, except the introduction of new words before reading the text. The topic of this chapter is vocabulary instruction, with the understanding that word meanings are always dynamic and tied to context.

Educators know that vocabulary must be introduced to students when reading a text, and that ELL students may be confused about the meanings of words in a new language. Teachers often struggle in working with ELL students, to know what, how and when to teach vocabulary. Gersten and Baker (2000) recommend that the number of new vocabulary terms introduced at one time to ELL students be limited to seven or fewer words, and that those words be selected carefully for usefulness. Words that are meaningful in the lives of the students, or that are key to understanding concepts in the text are good choices, for example. When selecting which words to teach, Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2002), in their discussion of effective vocabulary instruction for all students, point out that words have different levels of utility. They propose three tiers of vocabulary to describe word usefulness, which I found helpful to code the vocabulary that was introduced in both reading groups.

The first tier includes basic vocabulary that does not usually require instructional attention (i.e., clock, happy). The second tier encompasses high frequency words that play a large role in comprehension, and the third tier comprises vocabulary related to specific domains, such as science words, which are best learned when needed in a content area. Instruction in tier-two words can be the most productive to an individual's language ability. Tier-two words will vary with grade level and context. For example, words that

are going to be encountered in other situations and texts at a certain grade level would be the logical words to choose (Beck, et al., 2002). For ELL students, it may be necessary to teach tier-one words as well as tier-two words, depending on their knowledge of English.

Vocabulary instruction was a regular part of the guided reading events. I coded instances when new vocabulary was introduced, and then I used Beck et al.'s (2002) tiers of words to categorize those words. I will describe which words were selected in both reading groups in relation to tier-one, -two, and –three words. I then focused my attention to tier-two words because of their utility, and I looked at how those words were taught, and at any other dialogue pertaining to understanding and retention of the new words. The following two categories emerged in relation to teaching tier-two words which appeared to support construction of meaning: explanation and/or discussion of words, and attention to context clues. I then looked at words that can be problematic for ELL learners, such as words with multiple meanings, idiomatic expressions and abstract words (Anderson & Roit, 1997; Calderon, 2007; Cummins, 2001), which I coded as tier-two words. Finally, I created a category related to the suggestion that students become "linguistic detectives", and that language exploration be encouraged. I report on this category last.

Word Selection and Instruction

Irene typically introduced a list of words that she chose before reading a new text. Tier-one, -two and -three words were reflected in Irene's vocabulary list. For example, Irene chose: "ordinary," "famous," "raised," "quilts," "hobbies," "memories," "President Truman" and "switched" before reading *No Ordinary Grandma*, (Witham, 2007). This story was about Anna Mary Robertson, or Grandma Moses, a famous painter in the United States. "Famous," "memories" and "quilts" were tier-one words because they were likely familiar to these Grade 3 students. "President Truman" was a tier-three word and could have been explained briefly when encountered in the reading. The remaining words, "ordinary," "raised," "hobbies" and "switched" were valuable for these particular

students because the words were necessary for understanding the text, and would likely be used in other subject areas.

Wynn's vocabulary instruction included both tier-two and tier-three words. When specific words were necessary to understand a text, she explained these at the outset of reading. For example, one story was set in Georgia, so explanation of "collard greens," "middle school," and "widow woman" was needed to aid with understanding. When the students read "Mario's Mayan Journey," Wynn pointed out the meaning of Spanish words in the glossary. These examples could be considered tier-three words: words explained briefly for the benefit of understanding, but not crucial for vocabulary building. I next describe how tier-two words were taught and the context that supported their meaning.

Teaching Tier-two Words

Discussion and Explanation. Words that Wynn chose to teach while reading each text can be described as tier-two words. They were key to understanding the text, and were meaningful for these students in that they built on existing vocabulary knowledge, as will be reported in the following examples. She often explained words as they arose while she was reading with one student, and the rest of the group was reading independently. I wondered how she decided which words to teach. Both Kenton and Todd were excellent decoders, so when they stumbled on a word ("companionship," "chiefdom"), this seemed to be a clue for Wynn to ask if they knew the meaning. For instance, Kenton read "rugged" incorrectly, and Wynn asked him if he knew what it meant. He shook his said no, and she explained, "They are rough, uneven rocks." At other times she presumed which words might cause confusion, as in the excerpt below when she introduced a character to the whole group:

Wynn: "So this legend is about an old woman. She's very stubborn. What does stubborn mean? Cam?"

Cam: When you fool around with something and then you drop something and trip.

Angela: It means not smart?

Kenton: Mean?

Wynn finally explained, "No, not mean. Stubborn means that you want to have things your own way, and that you are always right, and you don't want to listen to anybody else, and you don't really take any suggestions very well." Wynn was attuned to which tier-two words might need explanation for these particular students.

Irene wrote the vocabulary words that she chose on a small white board, and discussed the meaning of each word before reading with the students. The words were reviewed again the following day before starting the text. The lengthy discussion at times was of benefit to Tatiana. Irene explained "ordinary" one day, and then asked Tatiana to "give an example of a grandma that's not ordinary" when the group met the day after the initial introduction to the word. Tatiana replied, "Uh...she works, she sews clothes, she does quilts. Look at the picture! She paints pictures, she bakes cookies, she makes lunch, she um...she does a lot of work." Tatiana was given an opportunity to verbalize her understanding of ordinary which grew out of the previous days' discussion.

At times, words were discussed which the students already knew, as in the excerpt below. The students had been reading a poem about a new baby sister from the point of view of an older sibling who was disappointed to not have a playmate, and Irene began a discussion of the word "useless:"

Irene: There's another word I want you guys to focus on for a minute. It says "so small and useless." What does useless mean? Darren?

Darren: It's where, where use, useless is...

Tatiana: Oh! I know!

Darren: Like you can't play....now.

Irene: Not exactly.

Tatiana: Like a ... and it doesn't work anymore so it is useless.

Irene: It's useless. OK.

Darren: You don't need it.

Irene: Useless is when you can't use it anymore. Usually it's broken, right. If, if a pencil is broken and you're not able to sharpen it, it's useless. Right? If a video game doesn't work anymore, it's useless. You can't use it anymore

They then continued to talk about the meaning of useless in the context of the poem.

On many occasions, words were explained succinctly, but the students did not remember the meaning when the word was discussed a day or two later. In the following excerpt, Tatiana could not read the word "lure:"

Irene: (helps her) lure. 'K, fishing lure. And what is that, a fishing lure?

Tatiana: What you fish with...?

Irene: um hm

Tatiana: And---

Irene: That could be the fishing pole. Fishing lure is what part?

Tatiana: Oh! How you...Those things that people go in, in, in the ocean there are sharp, people take one of big .... and they, I don't know, and they catch sharks...or something.

Irene: Hm-m-m. If I have a fishing pole, and I put a worm on the end, what's the lure?

Tatiana: The worm!

Irene: Exactly. And what it is is, a worm *lures* the fish in, it *draws* the fish to it, right, so that the fish will bite and eat the worm.

Tatiana: Yeah, once my--

Irene: OK, and then also, a lot of fisherman have special things that they buy, feathers, and yeah, colored stuff that they put on the end of their fishing line that hides the hook, and it's colorful or whatever to attract the fish, so again to draw the fish in, to have the fish be curious, so the fish comes in, checks it out, and ends up biting into the hook. So that's a lure, too.

Despite Irene's clear explanation, Tatiana could not recall the meaning of "lure" the next day. The students did not retain other new vocabulary words, such as "raised" and "profile." "Raised" was used in the sentence, "She raised five children" and Irene explained this word as taking care of, or providing for her children. The next day, the students could not remember the meaning. In the following transcript, the students were reading a book about coins, and Wynn explained the meaning of "profile."

Wynn: And when you see a picture like this, with a side view of a person, what is that called? A side view of a person is called a ...? (pause) Anybody know? It's called a profile. So sometimes they put side views of people, a *profile,* on the coin, not front, but sides.

The students appeared to listen intently as "profile" was explained, but in an interview with Kenton the next day, he indicated the word "profile" as a word that he did not know. Wynn's earlier explanation immediately came to mind, and I was surprised that he did not remember the meaning because at the time, I thought that her explanation was adequate.

Researchers recommend that students need repeated exposure to a word, as many as eight times, as well as opportunities to use the word, to be retained (Anderson & Roit, 1996; Beck et al, 2002). Carlo et al. (2004) state that "incidental vocabulary learning is not a reliable procedure for promoting vocabulary growth" (p. 191). Beck et al. suggest that word knowledge lies along a continuum. A person's word knowledge is multifaceted and can vary from never having seen a word, to a vague notion of the meaning, to knowing a word at a deep level. To know a word also implies knowing many aspects about the word, such as its literal meaning, its various connotations, how it can be used in different syntactic ways, its morphological options, as well as words that represent its synonyms, antonyms and words that are closely related in meaning (Carlo et al.). Playing with, and using new words in many different circumstances aids in vocabulary acquisition and knowing a word well. ELL students often have shallow word knowledge, even for frequently occurring words (August et al., 2006). However, many teachers are not well-versed in how best to meet the needs of their non-English speaking students, and

the guided reading time slot does not allow the time necessary to expand the students' understandings of new words.

Context Clues. Sometimes, when reading with one student, Wynn asked the student to refer to the glossary, or helped the student determine the meaning from context. For example, when she and Todd came across bowling "league," she suggested that they look up league in the glossary. When the word "novelty" was in a text, Wynn suggested that they read further to discern the meaning of the word:

Wynn: Novelty….oh novelty food. Let's read. Maybe we'll find out that that means. (Wynn and Todd read most of the book) Now, let's go back to this word novelty--novelty foods, novelty creatures. Do you have any idea what the word novelty means?

Todd: Create?

Wynn: Create it….create it. Something that's different. These are certainly different aren't they?

Wynn was teaching Todd how to discern the meaning of an unknown word through context, which researchers suggest is good practice for ELL students because it helps them to become independent word learners (Carlo, et al., 2004; Houk, 2005). However, the students must have a core vocabulary to work with (Blachowicz & Fisher; 2000). In other words, the student must know the meaning of the surrounding words to figure out the unknown word. In addition, Beck et al. (2002) note that many natural contexts are not helpful for deriving word meanings because an author's intent is to tell a story, not to convey the meaning of a set of words. They identified four types of contexts, categorized for their effectiveness in determining word meaning. "Misdirective" contexts can direct the student to an incorrect meaning, as in, "'Every step she takes is so perfect and graceful,' Ginny said *grudgingly* as she watched Sandra dance" (Beck et al., p. 4). The meaning of grudgingly could be misconstrued because the context does not make the word meaning transparent. Other contexts may not provide any clue to word meaning, ("nondirective contexts"), or minimal clues that require knowledge of the surrounding words ("general contexts"), and lastly there are contexts that lead to the correct word

meaning ("directive contexts"). Beck et al. conclude that, "...it is precarious to believe that naturally occurring contexts are sufficient, or even generally helpful, in providing clues to promote initial acquisition of a word's meaning" (Beck et al., p. 6) Teaching ELL students, or any students, how to discern meaning from context is more complicated than one may assume.

In the example above, Todd and Wynn read a good portion of the book to derive the meaning of 'novelty,' and Todd had enough proficiency in English to understand the word. It is also important to note that he had the verbal support of his teacher. She repeated his answer, agreed with it, and expanded on it when she said, "create it…something that's different." Beck et al. (2002) observe that learning new words from written context is much more difficult than learning from oral discourse because there is not the intonation, body language and shared context to support meaning when reading. These authors were addressing their comments to teachers of all students, and yet this observation resonates with Cummins' (2001) framework in that he suggests that ELL students need language to be context embedded for understanding. In this excerpt, Wynn's oral support provided the context to help Todd understand novelty.

The above discussion was helpful for Todd to come to know the meaning of novelty, but the teaching was implicit. ELL students can become independent learners of word meaning through explicit teaching of the use of context clues. On one occasion, the students read, "The young man was *enraptured* and instantly fell in love with the mermaid." and I noted that the passage before and after "enraptured" gave clues to its meaning. I was curious about Kenton and Todd's understanding of this word, and asked them about this word's meaning. Kenton thought that it meant "quickly" and Todd thought it meant "beautiful." I report this anecdote to make two points. The first is that the boys thought they knew the meaning of enraptured, and so were unaware of their error. The second point is that the time necessary for explicit vocabulary instruction is not built in to the guided reading time slot.

Problematic Tier-two Words. Words that can cause difficulty for ELL students include polysemous words, idioms and figurative language, and abstract words. I discuss

each of these kinds of words in this section. The surrounding words provide the context to indicate the meaning of polysemous words. "Words do not give meaning to sentences so much as sentences give meaning to words" (Eskey, 2002, p. 6). For example, the word *well* has many possible meanings, as in, "He plays football *well,"* or "He was sick, but he is *well* now." ELL students, with their culturally diverse backgrounds and limited knowledge of English vocabulary, can have difficulty understanding polysemous words, and may have difficulty determining their meaning from the surrounding words. For example, Wynn introduced a book by saying "This book...this book is like the book on coins." and Todd said, "Like?" This interjection is noteworthy in that Todd seldom contributed a response unless asked, and it appears that he was wondering about the meaning of like. Wynn replied, "It is *like* the book we just read about coins. Can somebody tell me why?"

In this text about United States coins, Wynn prompted a discussion about coin collecting. One of the questions for discussion at the back of the book was, "Why do you think people collect coins?" The following discussion ensued:

Wynn:	Samantha, why do you think people collect coins?
Samantha:	Uh...to look at them, cause they're really interesting...?
Wynn:	Yeah. Todd?
Todd:	To buy things.
Wynn:	O...K...
Cam:	Collect.
Wynn:	Collect. That means they go out and get them from people who sell them, and maybe put them in books or boxes.
Kenton:	Oh...they collect them because maybe they won't be making those kinds of coins anymore. So they keep them.

Kenton knew the meaning of collect in this context, but Todd's understanding was synonymous with saving—one would save (or collect) coins to buy things. Coin collecting may even be a cultural practice that is not in Todd's repertoire of experience. His answer caused Wynn to hesitate; she said "O...K..." while she considered Todd's

CANADIAN THESES
THÈSES CANADIENNES

PURDY, Joyce Lynn

CONSTRUCTING MEANING FROM TEXT THROUGH SOCIAL INTERACTION: AN INTERPRETIVE CASE STUDY OF ...

ISBN 978-0-494-46405-2
NR-46405

response, what it meant, and how she should respond. Cam repeated the word "collect," perhaps in an attempt to help Todd focus on the word, and its meaning. Cummins (2001) notes the unique challenges posed by two kinds of words: high frequency words from the Anglo-Saxon lexicon, which are often polysemous, and the low-frequency words derived from the Graeco-Latin lexicon, which tend to have fixed meanings. High frequency words can be considered tier-two words, and low-frequency words are tier-three words. Cummins adds that polysemous words are frequently used metaphorically or figuratively, whereas low-frequency words can often be associated with word families.

ELL students may have difficulty with idioms and figurative language because they may have a very literal comprehension and interpretation of the language. Wynn often noticed idiomatic expressions. For example, while reading about past presidents, the text read that a president "died in office" and she explained that he had not actually died in his office, but while he was president. When the students read about a character who had a "green thumb," Wynn initiated the following conversation:

Wynn:	In the book, near the beginning of the book, it says, "Momma had a green thumb. She kept a garden out back and was known around town for raising the best collard greens and yams for miles." What does that mean when it says, "green thumb." Momma had a green thumb?
Todd:	He kept on touching those vegetables so her thumb started to get green.
Wynn:	'K. What do you think, Kenton?
Kenton:	She...same answer as Todd.
Wynn:	She touched the vegetables and her thumb turned...
Kenton:	She touched...spinach. (unclear because they both talk at once)
Todd:	Like this (shows his thumb grinding on the desk) and then it gets green.
Wynn:	That happens sometimes when you're gardening. Cam, what do you think it means?

Cam: It means that, um...you like gardening a lot and you eat lots of vegetables, and you are vegetarian and you like vegetables.

Wynn: OK, What do you think, Angela?

Angela: That she liked having a garden and she gardened a lot.

Wynn: You can tell. See the picture? You can tell that she has a nice garden there. I think that she is a very good gardener. When you say that somebody has a green thumb, it means that they are very good at gardening. No matter what they plant, it grows. 'K? And you know Todd, you're right, when you're gardening, your hands do get sort of dirty and green from all the things that you're touching. Right?

The native English speakers seemed to have a better understanding of the phrase "green thumb," likely because of their longer exposure to English and their cultural knowledge. Wynn asked the students to give their ideas before the word was explained, with the result that Kenton and Todd listened avidly to others' contributions. At the end of the discussion, Todd was made to feel that his contribution was valuable when Wynn noted that he was right; one's hands do get "sort of dirty and green" when gardening.

In another instance, a character in the book "passed on" at the end of the story. As a result of an interview with Todd, I realized that he had not understood that the character had died. Although I did not interview Kenton, it is apparent from the excerpt shared below that he also did not understand the phrase. The day after the entire text had been read, the group had this conversation:

Wynn: Just wait. Kenton, what do you think that means? She "up and passed on all of a sudden this morning?"

Kenton: (no answer)

Wynn: Do you know what that means, Kenton?

Kenton: (no answer)

Cam: It means that she kept on going...on?

Wynn: (reads) "Inez looked up. 'You mean that's Miss Geneva?' she asked. 'That's right. She was on her way to the barn, probably to check on her chickens,' Papa explained."

Cam: She had a heart-ache or passed away.

Wynn: And passed away. What does that mean?

Cam: Died. [Kenton and Todd look from Cam to the teacher and their eyes are wide with surprise.]

Wynn: Died. Miss Geneva died. Now, we don't know how she died...

ELL students may not have the cultural experience and associations necessary to understand common idioms and metaphors, or to understand what may appear to be a simple text. Eskey (2002) gives the following example of the cultural knowledge required to understand a narrative about a North American birthday party: "It was the day of the big party. Mary wondered if Johnny would like a kite. She ran to her bedroom, picked up her piggy bank, and shook it. There was no sound (p. 6)." If a teacher asked, 'What did Mary wonder?' the question could easily be answered from the text (Mary wondered if Johnny would like a kite). However, if the teacher asked, 'Why did Mary shake her piggy bank?' an ELL student may have difficulty responding with the correct answer.

The figurative language used in some texts can also cause difficulty. When I asked Kenton to show me words that may have confused him after reading an Irish legend, he replied, "There's this word 'bear,' " (in the sentence "...for she loved her husband and children and could not *bear* the thought of what was about to happen"). "Bear" has two very different meanings. I explained that it meant burdened, but was aware that 'bear' is not used in everyday speech; it is an example of CALP, or literary language.

Abstract words can also be problematic for ELL students. Anderson and Roit (1996), in their study of reading comprehension instruction with language minority students, note that Cummins' distinction between BICS and CALP is a valuable one but that many teachers focus on high-frequency nouns, verbs and adjectives when teaching vocabulary. They point out that conjunctions, prepositions, negatives and abstract words

such as "few" and "some" carry much of the logic of the language, and that teachers may not realize that these words are misunderstood by their language minority students. Anderson and Roit also note that these words are difficult to learn and teach; many ELL students learn them as sight vocabulary but confusion about usage and meaning persist. An example of this confusion occurred with the abstract word "later," which appeared to cause difficulty for Todd and Kenton. Wynn asked the group to figure out the age of a baby platypus when it goes "for short swims." The passage read "At eleven weeks they open their eyes. A week later, they go for short swims." Kenton and Todd had difficulty understanding that the answer would be twelve weeks because that would be one week later than eleven weeks. Wynn was mystified as to why the boys were unable to give the correct answer, since both were well able to count. It wasn't until Wynn fortuitously said "Later means more." that Todd's eyes suddenly brightened, and he said, "Oh!" and came up with the correct answer. "Later" is an abstract word based on an understanding of the concept of time.

Fostering an Interest in Words

Students can be encouraged to develop an interest and awareness in new words, and to be curious about their meanings. In the following excerpt, Wynn was reading with Samantha, and they encountered the word "torture" in the sense that the character in the book did not like to run; it was "torture" for him. Wynn had this conversation with Samantha:

Wynn:	What does that mean "torture"? And what did he have to do? He was running...
Samantha:	And he dropped the baton.
Wynn:	So, how does he feel about that?
Samantha:	Um. He was upset with himself.
Wynn:	He was upset with himself. So that is what he means, when he does sports like running, it is some kind of torture, putting him through all these events, and it is just horrible for him.

Wynn helped Samantha to understand the meaning of torture by explaining it. However, further discussion may have proven interesting to the students because the word 'torture' is used dramatically; the boy was not really "tortured" when he engaged in the sport of running. After the teacher chooses which words to teach, they should be taught in interesting ways (Beck et al., 2002; Anderson & Roit, 1996). A discussion about this word and how its use did not reflect its literal meaning could have been interesting for this reading group.

In an interview with Kenton and Todd at the end of the study, I asked the boys if they understood what was spoken in kindergarten. The ensuing conversation revealed their confusion with some words.

Me:	When your teacher was talking [in kindergarten] did you understand what she meant?
Kenton:	Uh...]
Todd:	I understand everything.] spoken at the same time
Kenton:	All of everything. But sometimes when she's reading a book there were like, really long [words], so we actually didn't understand. We only understand part of it. Cause it was two words together.
Me:	Right. Right. Do you understand most things now?
Todd:	When there were two words together in kindergarten, I thought if they, I thought they still mean the same thing even though they were two words together.
Me:	Right. Compound words. Like um...butterfly. It isn't butter that's flying.
Todd:	(laughs)
Me:	It's a whole different thing, right? But do you understand most things now in the classroom?
Todd:	Yeah.
Kenton:	But some things I don't still.
Me:	Yeah?

Kenton: But my Dad sometimes, where he works, people teach him these new words, and are the same spelling and they say it the same way, and there's two meanings of it...and then he tells me them, but...it sounds weird.

I asked Kenton if he could think of an example, but he could not be explicit about what words his Dad had learned. This conversation indicates that the boys were aware of, and reflective about, the oddities and nuances of English words. I was ready to end the interview, but they seemed to enjoy our conversation, and continued to provide me with examples of words that puzzled them. Our conversation ended with Todd expressing confusion over "less words" that he said were "hard," which I took to mean that sometimes abstract words were difficult for him to understand.

Me: Right...like the word "run." The word "run" can have lots of meanings. You can run outside in the playground, water can run in a stream, um...sometimes ladies wear those pantyhose and if you get a line in it, that is a run...

Kenton: Or, sometimes bikes. There's these things that have wind, and when we pedal, that's running.

Me: Right.

Kenton: And for computers to work, it has to be running to work.

Todd: Yeah, there's the word "run" in the computer.

Me: Well, that's about all unless there's something you guys want to say.

Todd: The word "burn," there's two meanings of it.

Me: Burn?

Todd: Yeah. One is copy a disk on the computer... [I agree and give another example.]

Kenton: But sometimes there is two words in one but it's not a compound word.

Me: Right. There's words like that, too.

Kenton: That's what makes it hard because it looks like that's how you say it, but it's not.

Todd: Kind of like "behave."

The boys were eager to share their experience with words, and would likely benefit if similar discussions were held during class time. Dialogues such as this would incite a curiosity and enjoyment of words and their meanings.

Summary

In summary, effective vocabulary instruction is a complex process with many considerations. Learning about words includes both definitional information and contextual information about each word's meaning. The words that were introduced and taught in the reading groups were often appropriate for the students' proficiency levels and grade level. However, depth and breadth of word knowledge did not occur due to the time constraints of the guided reading time slot. There simply was not the time required for word extension activities suggested by the research and confirmed by the results of this study. Students need to manipulate and analyze words, point out unknown words, and talk about words to extend meaning, in order to retain word meanings. Students also benefit from strategies to discern how context affects word meaning.

The discussion about words was often beneficial for comprehension of the text. The time spent discussing idiomatic expressions and figurative language was especially valuable for these ELL students. Despite the fact that the focal children were born in Canada, and have been exposed to English for many years, they had difficulty with idiomatic phrases that one might assume they would understand, such as "green thumb" and "passed on." Through discussion, the word meanings became context embedded, which Cummins (2001) suggests is critical for understanding.

I reflected on Vygotsky's (1934/1986) theory of spontaneous and scientific concepts, and wondered how it could be applied to vocabulary instruction for ELL students. He suggests that word meanings develop from everyday understandings to a deeper and abstract (scientific) understanding, and that new concepts are related to

known concepts. An effective way to develop understanding of new words would be to relate the new word to known words, and use the vocabulary in appropriate situations. Semantic mapping is one strategy that helps students to see the semantic relatedness of words and concepts. Students graphically organize vocabulary into related groups of words (Anderson & Roit, 1996; Spangenberg-Urbschat & Pritchard, 1994) and in this way, new words are related to prior knowledge, and vocabulary is expanded with the addition of related words. The teacher would need to know about her students and their previous experience and background knowledge to effectively teach new vocabulary; the relationship between teacher and student that Cummins (2001) suggests is paramount to student success.

Academic language is more than just vocabulary; it is also the way words are put together. Attention to all aspects of language is important to help ELL students understand what they are reading. Environments need to be created where words are discussed, celebrated and used. Vocabulary and word work are critical for ELL students, but English-speaking students can benefit from carefully planned, rigorous vocabulary instruction as well.

CHAPTER 7
A FOCUS ON USE

English language learners need access to proficient speakers of the language to develop their English proficiency, but they also need opportunities to use language in authentic ways. When English language learners interact with others and express themselves in the classroom, three processes are stimulated: linguistic growth, cognitive development, and affirmation of identity (Cummins, 2001). Cummins notes that "Unless active and authentic language use…is promoted in the classroom, students' grasp of academic (and conversational) aspects of their second language is likely to remain shallow and passive" (p. 144).

In the context of the guided reading event, there were three categories of teacher-initiated talk that encouraged the students to use language: questioning, acceptance of speech, and elaboration of responses. Questioning refers to instances when the teacher asked questions that required students to use language to respond. I was interested in the kinds of questions that the teacher asked, and in the students' responses to those questions. The coding used by Skidmore, Perez-Parent and Arnfield (2003) helped me to further categorize the question/answer interactions. They looked at the dialogue in guided reading sessions and the different patterns of interaction between the teacher and students, and distinguished three types of questions that the teacher asked: questions with one right answer, questions with a finite set of acceptable answers, and questions with an infinite, though bounded, set of possible answers. More detail will be provided about each question type in the next section. Skidmore et al. noticed how particular questions affected student contributions and comprehension of text. They argued that time needs to be made available during guided reading sessions for discussion in which pupils are invited to play a more leading role in shaping the topic of conversation, instead of the teacher asking questions to which she knows the answer, nominating who will speak, and keeping a tight reign on the topic of discussion. There were also instances in my data when students asked their own questions, despite teacher control of the guided reading group; I therefore added student-initiated questions to the questioning category.

The second category of language use I have termed acceptance of speech. When ELL students use language to express themselves, the task can be linguistically difficult for them. This category accounts for instances when the ELL students gave answers or comments that were awkwardly spoken. The last category of language use considers instances when the ELL students gave one- or two-word answers, and the teacher asked them to give more detail in their reply. There are obvious overlaps with the questioning category, in that the teacher used questions to prompt an answer. However, the purpose of these questions was to encourage a more detailed response as opposed to the Skidmore et al. (2003) questions which prompted a particular answer. I have borrowed a term from Anderson and Roit (1996), "elaboration of responses" to name this category. I begin with a discussion of questioning, followed by acceptance of speech and elaboration of responses.

Questioning

> Curiosity spawns questions. Questions are the master key to understanding. Questions clarify confusion. Questions stimulate research efforts. Questions propel us forward and take us deeper into reading. (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, p. 81)

Questions are used in classrooms for a variety of purposes. Teachers' questions can invite deeper thinking, lead to a conclusion, or test for factual knowledge or understanding. Good readers question as they read (Pressley, 2002) and it is through questions that teachers can support the thought processes that accompany reading. The questions the teacher asks during guided reading shape the pattern of interaction.

The three types of questions that Skidmore et al. (2003) used for coding in their study led to different "degrees of freedom accorded to pupils by teacher questioning (p. 48)." They were: 1) questions with one right answer 2) questions with a finite set of acceptable answers and 3) open questions with no set answer, although a possible set of answers exists. The first kind of question, which I refer to as a type-one question, is characteristic of much classroom discourse, often referred to as the IRE or Initiation,

Response, Evaluation pattern (Cazden, 2001; Skidmore, et al., 2003) where a teacher asks a question to which she knows the answer. The question may be directed to the group, but is answered by one pupil, usually with a one- or two-word response. An example might be, "How did Papa help his son?" The question is closed in that the answer is directly in the text. The second kind of question (type-two) elicits a more detailed response, with various answers. "How did John feel about sports?" is an example of a type-two question; answers are limited to inference from the text, with more than one possible answer. The third kind of question (type-three) invites open discussion and dialogue, and can be described as authentic because teachers often do not know in advance what answers students might give. An example would be "Do you think you are good at sports?" There is a bounded set of possible answers and discussion might ensue about the topic of sports. Skidmore et al. suggest that the third kind of question prompts more contributions from the students. My thinking was comparable to the views of the authors in that I assumed that type-three questions were the most desirable for ELL students because of the opportunities to use language. My analysis shows that this is the case; however, I also realized that all three types of questions served a valuable purpose. I begin with a discussion of type-one questions.

Questions with One Right Answer

The first type of question is often criticized in the literature as prohibiting discussion (Cazden, 2001; Skidmore, et al., 2003). In many instances, this is true. Thinking is limited and responses may involve minimal elaboration from the pupil. This pattern of interaction is thought to reflect a traditional view of teaching and learning where the teacher is the transmitter of knowledge, and students display their learning when responding to these questions. However, type-one questions are sometimes useful, such as interaction patterns needed to work through a problem (Gibbons, 2002).

Wells (1998) defends this type of questioning, and I found his argument useful when reading over the transcripts. Wells suggests that teachers have two levels of responsibility: macro level teaching involves creating challenges that will interest

students in a group context to "stretch their capacities and lead them to extend and deepen their understanding of the topics with which they are engaged" (p. 31); and micro level teaching involves working within the zone of proximal development to assist an individual student in extending what s/he understands and is able to do. Micro level teaching requires direct instruction, or questions with one right answer; questions that address an aspect of the program of studies. In these latter situations, Wells makes the point that "the teacher has a special kind of contribution to make in this dialogic community" (p. 32). She must be attuned to students and where they are at, and what they need in order to progress. She must be able to assist by responding appropriately to the students' current engagement with the topic. The role of the teacher is key for both macro and micro teaching in that she has greater experience and understanding, and so there are times when she must explain ideas, information and procedures that are necessary for the activity. A type-one question lets her check for student understanding in such a case.

After analysis of my data, I noticed that questions with one right answer served as a review of terminology, which is especially important for ELL students so that they learn the academic language of school. Type-one questions also led the students to deeper levels of comprehension, helped to check for misunderstandings, and sometimes involved synthesis of the whole text. The following excerpts illustrate these points.

In the example below, type-one questions focused the students' attention, and served to review the academic terms "glossary," and "table of contents:"

Wynn:	What is this word after Chapter 6?
Todd:	Glossary
Wynn:	What is a glossary?
Todd:	(no answer)
Wynn:	Do you remember what a glossary is, Kenton?
Kenton:	Where there are words and you can look at the back and it tells you what they mean.
Wynn:	Exactly. Let's look at the back now. At the glossary...

Wynn asked the students to recall what a glossary was, and she had a definite answer in mind as evidenced by her response "exactly" when Kenton answered correctly. Irene opened a guided reading session with a similar question. She asked, "What is this?" in reference to the table of contents, and the students correctly answered that it told the reader what page each poem (in this case) was on. In other excerpts, type-one questions helped the students to understand aspects of expository text. For instance, when reading a timeline, the type-one questions was, "So the earliest coins would be what?" and, when viewing a calendar, the question asked was, "When did they start planning the party?" Type-one questions served the valuable purpose of reviewing previously taught terminology, or enabling students to read and comprehend expository text.

The notion that a question to which there is "one right answer" limits thinking can be misleading. At times, questions with one answer led to questions with more than one answer. During a guided reading session, Wynn talked to the students about coins, and questioned them about the animals that were on Canadian coins: "What's on our nickel?" "What's on our dime?" After these opening questions, Wynn then asked, "My question is, why are all those pictures on our coins?" a question that built on the previous questions and involved synthesis and inference. In Irene's group, she asked a type-one question after reading a poem: "So, does this person like Nancy Fedder?" The question required inference, and Irene was able to check for understanding. In the example below, the answer involved synthesis of the whole text. Wynn had asked the students: "What does this legend explain?" (This legend explained the existence of seven stones in a bay in Ireland. A mermaid becomes human when a chieftain puts a magic shawl on her, and the couple has seven children together. One day, the mermaid finds the magic shawl and must return to the water, taking everything she has accumulated while on land with her. Hence, she must take her seven children and they become seven stones in the bay.) The students had written their answers beforehand, and in the following excerpt discussed their answers. The responses the students gave also revealed their depth of understanding.

Wynn: What does this legend explain? Did you get this yet, Kenton?

Kenton: Yeah. (unclear) Only it's wrong.

Wynn: (sounds surprised) How do you know it's wrong? Samantha, what do you think this legend explains?

Samantha: It explains that a mermaid gets married, and she didn't want to see her children, so she turned them into stone, and never saw the chieftain again.

Wynn: OK. What do you think, Cam?

Cam: I said, 'How mermaids came to exist.'

Wynn: Angela?

Angela: I said, 'How seven stones in the bay got to be there?'

Wynn: Kenton?

Kenton: I said that mermaids are not real.

From the student's responses, the teacher could see that only Angela had understood the meaning of the legend. She then referred the students to a key passage in the text:

Wynn: OK, I want you to turn to the first section here and I want you to read on page 7, just that paragraph at the top....Let's read it together. "Ireland is a land of magic...take the story of the seven stones of Sligo, for example." So Angela's idea, I think your idea was right on, although all of you had very good ideas. In this day in Sligo in Ireland, there are seven stones in the water. And so this legend, or this story explains how those stones got there. Does that make sense?

Wynn read the passage aloud in an effort to help the students understand the text.

Type-one questions can also be a form of "chit-chat" where conversation is initiated and the teacher can learn about a student's out-of-school life. However, a teacher would have to have this purpose in mind, as conversations can take a myriad of directions, as the excerpt below illustrates. Wynn had been reading with Kenton while the other children read independently. She stopped the reading to ask if Kenton collected coins. The teacher did not know the answer to the question, so it is not a typical type-one

question. However, the question is closed and so does not invite an elaborated response. Kenton began to talk about a coin he had.

Wynn: Do you know anyone who collects coins, Kenton?

Kenton: No.

Wynn: No, I don't either. But there's a lot of people who do that as a hobby. They collect—

Kenton: I have a coin that has a, in the middle there is a white circle, and then—

Wynn: Is it from China?

Kenton: Uh...no.

Wynn: Do you know what country it is from?

Kenton: No.

The conversation began with a sincere question and initially Kenton did not give an elaborated response, but he later began to share a personal story. Although Wynn appeared interested in the coin and attempted to draw him out, the interruption and questions she asked elicited closed responses. If the teacher had the express purpose of finding out about a student's background, type-one questions could elicit this information.

There were instances when type-one questions led to the kind of interactions that are criticized in the literature (Cazden, 2001); when responses were limited to yes/no answers. After reading a poem about a new baby sister, Irene asked the students, "Can this little baby be a playmate right now?" As expected, two students answered, "No." Despite the closed question, Irene and Tatiana continued the conversation:

Irene: No, she can't do anything, right?

Tatiana: He might have to go and find new friends. That's all she means, maybe.

Irene: Maybe. He may have to find other people to play with him because his baby sister can't play with him.

Tatiana: Maybe, maybe he's waiting for her to get bigger and, and to play with him.

Tatiana's talkative nature enabled her to be an active participant even when the dialogue did not encourage interaction.

To summarize, questions to which there is one right answer can provide opportunities for second language development, and the interactions can be much more complex than the IRE (initiation, response, evaluation) pattern. There are clear differences between closed questions, which tend to prompt unelaborated responses, and type-one questions, which can be effective in inviting language use. The excerpts above revealed that type-one questions were valuable to review the academic language of texts, and to build conversational fluency. Type-one questions can involve higher level thinking, and help the teacher to ascertain gaps in comprehension. Wells (1998) suggests that the questions teachers ask should be judged for their contribution to student learning. He notes that one must consider the context: is the question necessary to scaffold student learning, or is the question going to stretch student thinking? As Cazden (2001) states:

> The new importance of discourse in school-improvement efforts comes not from any anticipated substitution of nontraditional for traditional lessons, but from the need for teachers to have a repertoire of lesson structures and teaching styles and the understanding of when one or another will be most appropriate for an increasingly complex set of educational objectives (p. 56).

I would add that teachers consider the diverse students in their classrooms as well as educational objectives.

Questions with a Finite Set of Acceptable Answers

Despite the value of type-one questions, one can see from these examples that their use is limited. When students are only required to give one-word or single-clause responses, they are likely not cognitively challenged, nor is there an opportunity for the learner's language to be extended. The Alberta Language Arts Program of Studies requires a different kind of talk; talk that is exploratory in nature, talk that questions,

conjectures, solves problems and explores options. Questions that are open-ended in nature invite students to stretch their capabilities; the macro level teaching to which Wells (1998) refers. He adds that macro level teaching is best achieved through an inquiry orientation to the curriculum, where teachers provide a context for collaborative knowledge-building. All students benefit from open-ended questions, but ELL students especially benefit because they are required to draw upon their linguistic resources to produce an answer.

Analysis of the responses to type-two questions revealed that they were cognitively and linguistically challenging for the ELL students. I found that the teacher asked more questions to support thinking when the students required help with a type-two question. In addition, the open-ended nature of a type-two question at times resulted in responses from the ELL students that were limited in nature. I discuss the cognitive and linguistic challenges of type-two questions next.

Cognitive Challenges of Type-two Questions. In the following two excerpts, a type-two question was asked, and then further questioning acted as a kind of support to aid in understanding. In the first excerpt, the students in Wynn's group had read a book about United States coins, and the picture on the cover of the book was of the backs and fronts of these coins. Wynn read a question posed at the back of the book:

Wynn:	How did the title and cover photo help you predict what kinds of information you would learn about coins? Kenton?
Kenton:	Uh...It shows different pictures on the coins.
Wynn:	It shows different pictures on the coins. Todd?
Todd:	It tells you the names of the coins. [The cover does not tell this.]
Wynn:	Where? On the cover? We're talking about the cover and the title page. OK...Samantha, how does the picture and title tell you what you are going to learn on the inside of the book?
Samantha:	Um, on the inside?
Wynn:	Mmmhmm. How does this picture help you? And how does this title help you?

Samantha: The pictures of heads that have been Presidents...?

Wynn: That's right. Kenton?

Kenton: There's people that were Presidents...?

Wynn: Can you tell that from this picture?

Kenton: No.

The students were clearly struggling with an answer to the question. They may have had difficulty with the academic language of "cover photo," "predict" and "kinds of information," they may have been confused with the wording of the question, or a combination of both. Did the authors of the book intend the answer to be obvious in that the picture of coins on the cover tells the reader that the book will be about United States coins, and the Presidents represented on those coins? If this is the case, then Kenton was on the right track with his observation that the pictures on the coins reveal what the book will be about. Wynn tried to help the students by rephrasing the question using words that the students could understand ("picture" for "cover photo" and "going to learn on the inside" for "kinds of information"). She also tried breaking the question into two parts, but with little success. Finally Wynn helped them to answer the question through this exchange:

Wynn: What does the title tell you—*United States Coins*—what does that mean? Does that help you understand what was in the book?

Todd: Yeah.

Wynn: Did it talk about coins from any other country?

Todd: No.

Wynn: Did it talk about Canadian coins?

Todd: No.

Wynn: No, it doesn't. We're just talking about United States coins, United States and Presidents of the United States.

Through questioning and modified language, the students were able to make meaning of this type-two question.

Irene also used questions, at times, to help Tatiana comprehend a text. The students had read a poem which read (Katz, 1997):

My Sister

Sometimes when you
Fall asleep,
Curled close like a kitten
In the back seat of the car,
I forget I hate you.

Irene then asked:

Irene:	So what is that poem telling us?
Tatiana:	That doesn't make any sense, any, any sense.
Irene:	And why is it confusing for you, Tatiana?
Tatiana:	(she re-reads the poem) That doesn't make any sense.
Irene:	'K. The brother's writing it. How many brothers quite often say about their sisters, 'I hate you.' ?
Tatiana:	My brother does.
Irene:	OK. Do you really believe he hates you?
Tatiana:	Kind of. I don't know.
Irene:	Usually they don't really hate them. It's just something brothers say and sisters will say it to their brothers too. And they really don't mean it at all. [Later] Does that make sense to you, Tatiana?
Tatiana:	Yeah, yeah.

These excerpts are just two examples of when the teachers used further questioning to help students to answer type-two questions. The teachers guided the students through the process of answering the original question to help students make meaning, and to better understand academic language.

Linguistic Challenges of Type-two Questions. Type-two questions tend to involve divergent thinking. In the following two excerpts, the responses of Kenton and Todd reveal how they struggled to express themselves when higher level thinking was required.

The excerpts also provide insight into their level of participation, especially when contrasted with the answers of the native-English speakers.

In the first excerpt, the students read answers that they had written the day before in response to the question, "Did you enjoy the story? Why or why not?" Kenton's replies end with a rising inflection, indicating uncertainty with his answer; whereas the native English speakers ended their responses confidently.

Kenton:	Uh...I enjoyed this story because I never read a story about a mermaid before?
Wynn:	OK. That's great. Todd? (pause) Did you enjoy the story?
Todd:	Yeah.
Wynn:	OK. Can you tell us why?
Todd:	(quietly) Cause....there are lots of details in the book.
Wynn:	There was. Mmmhmm. OK. Samantha?
Samantha:	I liked the ideas of it.
Wynn:	The ideas in the story? Cam?
Cam:	I liked how they say stuff like..um..:.where is that one thing (flips through book) "when the mermaid combed her hair, (reads aloud) in the prettiest voice—"
Wynn:	You like the language in the book?
Cam:	Yeah, like how they say, "and she took the shell and wrapped it in a—"
Wynn:	--shawl?
Cam:	"...the shawl...and wrapped it in her hand and held on and touched the children.'
Wynn:	Very descriptive language. ...

Cam responded to the text itself by quoting passages that resonated with him; whereas Kenton's and Todd's responses were limited. Wynn offered Todd mediated support to encourage an in-depth answer when she asked "Can you tell us why?" but he still sounded unsure of himself when he spoke quietly. At first glance the responses of the

ELL students are acceptable, but a closer look reveals that "I liked the ideas of it" and "there are lots of details" could be answers given to any text. Kenton and Todd may have internalized the kinds of answers the teacher wanted to hear which were acceptable in the discourse of this classroom, and school in general.

The contrast between the responses of ELL students and native English speakers can also be seen in the next part of the same excerpt. The story did not end happily and Wynn had asked the students what they thought of the ending:

Wynn:	What about the end? I was rather sad when I read the end of the story, because it wasn't a happy ending, and I thought it might....because it was like a fairytale, I thought it might end happily. What did you think, Angela?
Angela:	I thought that it was very good because they made it a different ending from most fairytales.
Wynn:	Oh!
Angela:	It was a sad ending instead of a happy one.
Wynn:	That's a very good point. Most fairytales have a happy ending like the...the prince, the prince marries the princess, and they live happily ever after, right. So, it's a nice change to have something different. What did you think Kenton? [Before he has time to answer, she says...] Did you feel sorry for the chieftain who was all by himself?
Kenton:	Yeah.
Wynn:	Mmmhmm. What did you think, Todd?
Todd:	(says nothing...pause) um-m-m (long pause)
Wynn:	Did you like the ending the way it was, or would you have changed the ending?
Todd:	(pause) I liked the ending.
Wynn:	Did you? [to another student] What about you?

Angela had a definite opinion, whereas Kenton was a reluctant participant, and Todd had difficulty responding to a question that required his opinion, despite Wynn's encouragement. Her questions may have been confusing ("What did you think, Kenton?" and "Did you feel sorry for the chieftain who was all by himself?"), and Kenton may have been unsure of which question to answer. Nevertheless, the boys are reticent to express their views.

Tatiana, on the other hand, was a risk-taker and eager contributor to the guided reading discussions. For example, after reading a poem about a young girl who would rather do homework than play, Tatiana surmised, "And she folds her clothes, she…her…I bet her room isn't messy." On another occasion, Irene commented, "This poem is hard to understand" and immediately Tatiana offered her interpretation of the poem, "That, uh, people are calling her names and teasing her." There are many examples of Tatiana's spontaneous responses in the data. I suggest possible reasons why she was able to be an active participant after the next two examples.

The last two excerpts reveal how Todd especially, was unable to use language to show that he had constructed meaning. Wynn had asked Todd his opinion of a character in the story, and what the italics might mean.

Wynn:	What do you think of Harry? ["Harry," makes life miserable for the main character by teasing and bullying.]
Todd:	(No answer.) [Wynn talks about Harry and they continue to read].
Wynn:	[Some words are in italics and Wynn points this out.] Why would they put those words in italics?
Todd:	(no answer)
Wynn:	Why does the author do that?
Todd:	To make it more interesting.
Wynn:	Yes, to make it more interesting...and that might be very important...

The character of "Harry" is such that the reader can easily dislike him and have an opinion about him; however, Todd does not give an answer. He then needed the second

question repeated, and his response does not adequately explain why the author used italics. Authors generally put words in italics to create emphasis rather than to make the text 'interesting.'

In the last example, Wynn asked a type-two question which required the students to consider how a character evolved from the beginning to the end of the story.

Wynn: This question, you don't have to answer, I want you to think in your head. How has Callum's perception of himself changed from the beginning of the book to the end? At the beginning of the book he was feeling one way about himself, and by the end of the book, he was feeling a little bit differently about himself. How has that changed? How was he feeling about sports at the beginning of the book, Samantha?

Samantha: He felt that he wasn't really good at it.

Wynn: And by the end of the book, Kenton?

Kenton: He felt like he was good at sports.

Wynn: Now how did that all happen? What caused that to happen? Angela?

Angela: Because he joined the bowling league of bowling.

Wynn: He did, he joined the bowling league, but what else helped him to feel differently about himself in the beginning of the book to the end. Todd, what helped? ... He wasn't good at sports, and he was worried that he wouldn't do well, and by the end of the book, he was feeling more confident. He wouldn't mind doing bowling. What else helped him feel that way, besides joining the bowling league. Besides Tanya. [She directs her comments to Todd.]

Todd: (says nothing)

Samantha: 'Cause Pa was encouraging him to do it?

Wynn: Pa was encouraging him all the way, right? So, with a little encouragement and a little...practice...(Kenton interrupts.)

Kenton: He kept on emailing him.

Wynn: He kept on emailing him.

Kenton was able to respond to the question; however, Todd did not answer despite Wynn's prompts and repetition.

I contemplated why Todd was not an active participant in discussions involving opinions, ideas and reflections. Given his quiet, reflective nature, the pace may have been too fast for him, and perhaps he needed more time to formulate an answer. I looked to the literature for possible explanations, and Gibbons (2002) notes that the kind of teacher-student interaction that occur in classrooms is often not supportive of ELL students' language development. Students get fewer chances to speak, and say little when given the opportunity to do so. ELL students may need interactions modified to allow for more equitable speaking rights, she suggests (Gibbons, 2002). This may be because of a developing proficiency in the language. Todd may not have had a level of English proficiency that allowed him to draw upon words easily to describe his thoughts. Hence, Cummins' (2001) suggestion that ELL students need opportunities, or practice, to use language in order to develop it. The reasons for Todd's non-participation may be even more complex; culturally, he may be unused to expressing his opinion, or the discourse of school may not have matched the discourse of home. Wiltse (2004) cautions against ascribing general traits to an ethnic group, and cites research that confirms the difficulty in determining whether behaviour is a personality trait or a cultural expectation. Tatiana's outgoing personality certainly appeared to be a factor in her ability to spontaneously offer her insights and interpretations. There are no easy answers to why some ELL students were able to participate, and others were not. More will be said about the focal children in the next chapter, and these questions will be considered further in the remainder of the dissertation.

My concern for Todd is that he was not using language which fosters cognitive development and linguistic growth (Cummins, 2001). He was not using language to express his feelings and ideas, which can lead to a personal connection to the text, and an affirmation of self. This particular scenario is a familiar one from my previous experience

in the classroom, and incidences such as this prompted my question of how ELL students use oral language to construct meaning. Comprehension involves many aspects of the text, such as understanding author intent, whether or not the ending was feasible or satisfying, and an awareness of characters and how they evolve. The ability to talk about one's understandings deepens comprehension in a community of learners. I wonder about the students' depth of understanding if they are unable to express their insights and opinions.

Questions with Infinite Responses

When the teacher asked a question to which she did not know the answer, the talk became freer. As with type-two questions, open-ended questions invite a thoughtful and detailed response. The excerpts reported next are from discussion of a book that was introduced six weeks after the study began. The book, *Miss Geneva's Lantern* (Lake, 1996), seemed to resonate with the students. A young girl, Inez, befriends an older woman, Miss Geneva, who the townspeople think may be a witch. Miss Geneva helps Inez one night when she is frightened by a ghostly figure, Mr. Boone, on the verandah of the deserted house where Mr. Boone lived and died. From the outset, the dialogue in the guided reading group was different from previous discussions.

In the first excerpt, the teacher's question prompted the students to think of possible reasons why Miss Geneva may have acted as she did. Her question required students to analyze information from the text to conjecture possible answers.

Wynn: Why would somebody live all by themselves and maybe never be friendly with other people around them? What would be a reason for that? It looks like she has a house...I see she has a well, a garden—[Everyone is looking at the illustration in the book.]

Kenton: A clothesline

Wynn: A clothesline.

Todd: It looks like she has a fine house.

Wynn: Doesn't it! It looks like a very nice, small farm. Why would she maybe not go into town and be friends with people?

Kenton: ...cause

Two students at once: OH!

Wynn: Angela?

Angela: Maybe because she doesn't like going into town. Maybe she just likes being around her house and stuff.

Wynn: That's very possible. What do you think, Todd?

Todd: Maybe the town is very far...far from her house.

Wynn: She finds it difficult to travel. Maybe she has no way of getting there.

The teacher did not know the answer, and the dialogue unfolds naturally with everyone contributing a response. Todd, too, offered his opinion, a relatively rare occurrence in the data. The question inspired animated talk that became exploratory as the discussion continued:

Wynn: In those days...I don't see a horse or a wagon here. Maybe she had to walk...?

Todd: Yeah...it might hurt...

Cam: I know what!

Wynn: Cam?

Cam: She could ask someone.

Kenton: But no one's there.

Cam: Yeah! She had neighbours.

Kenton: No.

Wynn: She sort of lived down this road, right. And Inez lived in this house, and then she passed by Mr. Boone's house, who is no longer...

Cam: ....alive

Wynn: Right. And then she came to Miss Geneva's house. So, there are people around.

Kenton: She might just like the dark or something? She doesn't want to…like, when the sun comes out...when she's up, maybe it hurts her eyes.

Wynn: Maybe

Angela: Maybe she doesn't need to go to town, because she has everything at her house...?

Wynn: Maybe she has everything around here.

The students and teacher created a knowledge-building community (Wells, 1998) where the possible answers to the question became the object of their discussion. Speakers must listen to and interpret the responses of others, and then decide on their own opinion to make a related contribution. The dialogue itself becomes the mediator of knowledge building. All participants contributed to the dialogue to work out their meaning of the text.

In the next excerpt, Wynn asked a type-three question that required a personal connection to the text. The dialogue is not as clear as the transcript suggests; often the students' comments ran into and over top of one another, suggesting that the students were engaged with the text.

Wynn: So have you ever been wrong about a person? Have you ever had the wrong impression about somebody?

Kenton: Sometimes.

Todd: Yeah.

Wynn: Like, Inez had the wrong impression about Miss Geneva?

Chorus: (including Todd): Yeah....I have...Yeah

Wynn: How has that happened, Todd?

Todd: (no answer)

Wynn: Sometimes you think people are one way, and when you get to know them, they turn out to be different? Have you ever had that? Has that happened to you?

Todd: Yeah... (no elaboration)

Wynn: Kenton?

Kenton: It happened to me in kindergarten because when I went to school nobody played with me, so I thought they were going to be mean to me...? So, after I became friends with them, they were actually nice to me.

Wynn: Oh! OK. So sometimes we get the impression we think people are one way, and they're completely different, right? Have you ever had that happen, Angela? And sometimes people's outward appearance fools us, too because, I think Mrs. Wylie was talking about that when she was teaching us about legends...she said sometimes...

Kenton: ...like a geode is ugly but...]

Todd: ...inner beauty] Students are talking at once.

Wynn: Yes, and inside they're very nice, they're very beautiful people. Like a geode on the outside is just a plain...rock.

Angela: And then you open it and it's nice inside

Wynn: Yeah! Very much like this.

Wynn's reference to Mrs. Wylie was as a guest storyteller, and the boys interjected with their memories of a geode in the story she told. They were making connections between the text and their in-school experiences, and Kenton was able to connect personally with the events in the story.

Why did this kind of talk occur during this particular guided reading lesson, and not before or after? What conditions make such talk possible? One possibility is that the story itself invited an aesthetic response to the story. As mentioned in a previous chapter, when the content of the text resonates with student experience, they are better able to

personally respond and engage with the text. The themes in this story of friendship, fear and the supernatural were topics that the students could relate to. Another possibility is that the students were feeling safe and confident enough to offer their responses without fear of reprisal. Cam had joined the group at the beginning of my study six weeks earlier, and likely his presence as well as mine created a "new" group that had to spend time together to build community. A third possibility is that the open-ended questions prompted talk, and Wynn stepped back and let the students take the lead. Likely, the rich, authentic conversation that occurred was a result of a combination of the above.

The teacher-student interactions took on a new dimension with this particular narrative, as seen in the excerpts above. In addition to the dialogue prompted by open-ended questions about this text, the students began to ask questions on their own initiative. I discuss this theme next.

Student Questions and Comments

As was seen in the previous excerpts, Kenton and Todd became more active participants as the study progressed. The following excerpts illustrate this phenomenon as well as their self-initiated questions. In the excerpt below, when *Miss Geneva's Lantern* (Lake, 1996) was first introduced, Kenton and Todd volunteered readily and they seemed to support what the other said:

Wynn: All right, now then. We're going to start a new book today. So, what I'd like you to do is look at the cover, read the title and I'd like you to read the teaser on the back…

[Students do as asked. Cam reads the book instead of the teaser.]

Kenton: It seems like a scary story, at the back it tells you.

Todd: Yeah

Wynn: Do you think we can read it together? It's about a little girl named Inez. [Everyone reads the teaser aloud.] "And then **things** start to happen.

Why is this word "things" in bold letters?

Cam: Oh! Some--

Wynn: Excuse me. Why do you think, Samantha?

Samantha: It means you have to say it a bit louder...?

Wynn: **Things.** With expression. **Things** start to happen. So, when you say it louder with expression--

Kenton: Scary things?

Wynn: Scary things maybe? Unusual things, perhaps? What do you think? (to Todd)

Todd Important things.

Wynn: Oh! Important things! Oh, that's a good one.

Kenton responded to the teaser with an aesthetic response, "It seems like a scary story, at the back it tells you" and Todd agreed with his "yeah." Later in the excerpt, Kenton interrupted Wynn in the middle of her explanation about why 'things' would be written in bold letters by saying, "scary things?" Kenton's interruption was unusual and indicates his cognitive engagement with the book.

Kenton's level of participation is especially noteworthy because he began to ask questions, to share his insights and comments, and to ask for clarification. I interpreted this behaviour to indicate text comprehension. Highfield (1998), in her study of literacy learning among her fifth-grade students, notes that, "Students were connecting the text to their lives … their text comprehension was evident in the topics of discussion…they were actively engaged in real conversations about text (p. 174)." The following excerpt, when Kenton asked for clarification, was the first instance in my weeks in the classroom that I heard Kenton ask a question on his own initiative. Wynn had explained that one of the main characters in *Miss Geneva's Lantern* (Lake, 1996), was a young girl in middle school, which would be about Grade 6, 7 or 8. She then talked about another character, Miss Geneva, and Kenton confused the two characters. Wynn continued to explain to the students that the story took place in a rural area, when suddenly Kenton said:

Kenton: I've got a question...if she had a husband, she wouldn't be in 8 or 7. [Referring to grades in school]

Wynn: She might be what? [She was unsure of his meaning because the talk had been about the meaning of rural.]

Kenton: Well, if she had a husband, she won't be in Grade 8 or 7.

Cam: It's a different person.

Wynn: This person.

Kenton: Oh.

Wynn: Miss Geneva is a widow woman, she lost her husband. Inez is the little girl in the story, who's in middle school.

It also represents a breakthrough in the group discussion; a student has asked his own question rather than attempting to answer the teacher, or the text's question.

After the students read *Miss Geneva's Lantern* (Lake, 1996), Kenton interrupted the dialogue to explain what he took away from the narrative.

Kenton: (interrupts) There's a lesson in this book.

Wynn: Is there? (sounds surprised and encouraging)

Todd: Yeah. That... that--

[Students begin talking at once.]

Wynn: Just a second, let Kenton go first.

Kenton: That, if someone doesn't come out like in town or something, very long, it doesn't mean they're a witch, or something.

He was willing to take this risk, and his comment prompted excited talk among his peers.

In the next excerpt, Kenton was able to change the topic of discussion and Wynn followed his lead. She had asked a type-three question about the character, Miss Geneva:

Wynn: When Inez first met Miss Geneva, she thought she was a witch. "*Inez felt numb. She could hardly speak. 'But I thought you were like a witch. I heard you were the meanest of the meanies!' She blurted out. Miss Geneva laughed and laughed. 'Yes, I know the stories people tell,' she said, shaking her head. 'Do you think I'm like a witch now?' 'Well, no, I surely don't, but I saw Mr. Boone. That's why I was so scared, and ran so fast.'* " Why did Inez have

	the idea that Miss Geneva was like a witch? How did she get that idea? Todd?
Todd:	Well, people tell stories that she is a mean witch?
Wynn:	What do you think, Kenton?
Kenton:	Well, people keep making stories about her, but ...but, we don't know in the story, but isn't she going to be sad or something?
Wynn:	Who?
Kenton:	Miss Geneva? Because people keep telling stories about her?
Wynn:	That's a very good point. She does live all by herself. So...
Cam:	That's why! Because she's a widow woman.
Wynn:	What do you think, Angela?
Angela:	Because maybe, her house, and we never really see her a lot. People get the idea that she is a witch, and they start telling stories about her.
Todd	Yeah!
Cam:	Not really.
Wynn:	Do you think that Miss Geneva associates with other people in the town? Do you think she goes to town a lot and--?
Chorus:	No! [All students together.]

Kenton's question reflected an aesthetic response to the story ("Isn't she going to be sad or something?"), and Wynn, unsure of his meaning, asked "Who?" Then she was responsive to his intended meaning, and provided positive feedback, "That's a very good point." Both Kenton and Todd contributed answers to the first question which prompted opinions and guesses, and all of the students were engaged and chimed in their responses on the heels of the previous comment.

The following two excerpts illustrate what Van den Branden (2000) terms "negotiation of meaning" defined as "the joint efforts that interlocutors make in oral or written interaction to deal with problems of message comprehensibility" (p. 429). Cam

offered comments that prompt heated talk among his classmates. In the first excerpt, the discussion centered around the phrase "widow women," used in the text:

Cam:	Know what? Know what I think it is? Um...Cause she's a widow woman. Witches are always widow woman.
Todd:	No.
Kenton:	No!
Wynn:	How do you know that?
Cam:	Because...witches don't marry.
Wynn:	hm-m-m
Cam:	Yeah, so they're always widow women
Kenton:	No, but she married before, and her husband died.
Angela:	Your husband has to die.
Wynn:	That's a widow. Yeah, you have to be married to be a widow.
Todd:	Yeah.
Wynn:	Your husband has to die.
Cam:	Some witches are widows.
Todd:	No!
Wynn:	Some could be...
Angela	Witches never really get married.
Todd:	Yeah, never.
Kenton:	Rarely.

The group as a whole was negotiating the meaning of widow, and whether or not witches marry. Todd and Kenton contributed spontaneous, heartfelt responses that were rarely seen during the time of the study. Wynn's previous role as leader of the discussion became one of participant; she invited Cam to clarify his statement by asking sincerely, "How do you know that?" Wynn did not nominate students to give an answer as in previous sessions, likely because they were all authentically involved in this negotiation of meaning. Her voice trailed off when she said, "Some could be..." as she ruminated about whether witches could be widows; she clearly did not have an answer in mind.

Wynn then ended the conversation with: "That's a good question. Something to think about."

In the next excerpt, Cam again gets the discussion going. Wynn and the students had been discussing an unfamiliar vocabulary word "haints," which means ghost or spirit, and Wynn had asked them what they thought the word meant. Cam suggested that the appropriate word to use when referring to ghosts was spirit, but his comments caused argument among the other students:

Cam:	Know what? You shouldn't call people um...spirits...ghosts. Cause that's not their real name	
Wynn:	So, he was a ghost?	
Cam:	spirit .... a spirit	
Wynn:	Well, in the dictionary, it's a ghost.	
Cam:	It's a spirit.	
Todd:	Spirit *is* ghost.	
Cam:	Yeah, but it's just like buffalo. Buffalo isn't the right name for bison. It's bison. It's just the same as ghost.	
Todd:	There's two words for ghost.]	children are
Angela:	Yeah. It's a spirit.]	talking at
Cam:	Yeah. Ghost is a kind of name...]	once
Kenton:	A spirit is a person's life after they die.	
Cam:	Yeah, a spirit is...]	
Wynn:	That's a very good explanation. (to Kenton)	
Angela:	Spirit and ghost is the same thing.] talking at once	
Cam:	Yeah, but a spirit is its real, real name for ghost.	
Wynn:	So Miss Geneva said, "He's never bothered good people and children. I know you were afraid. But don't be."	

The ensuing talk represents negotiation of meaning; the children and the teacher were constructing meaning from the text by building on what each other said and questioning each other's intended meanings. There were authentic responses from all of the students,

including the ELL students. Todd noted that spirit and ghost is the same word. Kenton's comment ("A spirit is a person's life after they die.") was particularly interesting because this term had been used to describe a deceased hero during a class discussion the previous day. Kenton had internalized ways of using language and word meanings, and was now publicly using what he had learned the day before.

The group did not reach conclusions about the difference between spirit and ghost, or whether or not witches marry, but the negotiation of meaning prompted valuable talk. Negotiation of meaning is a process and not an outcome because there are times when mutual comprehension is not successful. The benefit of this dialogue, despite the lack of consensus, is that negotiation of meaning promoted language acquisition (Van den Branden, 2000) for the ELL students. They were required to use language to express themselves, and their current level of language proficiency was expanded. An added benefit is that when children are given opportunities to negotiate meaning, they are better able to comprehend the text, especially children learning a second language (Van den Branden, 2000).

Van den Branden (2000) alludes to the many forms of literary discussion that can have an effect on negotiation of meaning which are valuable to apply to this guided reading session. When reading and discussing a text with students, he suggests the following considerations: Is the talk about grammatical constructions, or the reception of the text by different readers? In this instance, the discussions were not about literal meaning but wondering and hypothesizing about character and plot development. Secondly, who is involved in the discussion? Again, all of the children present (Samantha was absent) were actively involved and engaged in the discussion, as both listeners and contributors. Thirdly, what is expected of the participants? On this day, the teacher asked questions that evoked a personal response about the text, she let the children speak when they had something to say (rather than nominating who should speak), and then supported the students in their interpretations of the text.

Wells and Chang-Wells (1996) refer to this phenomenon as collaborative talk; it emphasizes both the personal and social aspects of learning, and has literate

consequences. When children make their thoughts public, they are sharing their personal understandings, and this opens a path to discussing their knowledge. They note that when children use language in a social context for cognitive purposes, collaborative learning is the result. This kind of talk, Wells (2001) suggests, is the most valuable kind of talk. He is referring to all children, but for ELL students, talk is necessary to develop language proficiency as well as to deepen understanding.

In summary, type-two and -three questions, to which there are a variety of answers, tended to invite talk among the group, and then conversation built on what someone else said. The type-two questions in this study proved to be cognitively and linguistically challenging for the ELL students. The teachers asked more questions to help the students with an answer, but the students, especially Todd, struggled to express their thoughts and opinions. Type-three questions and student-initiated questions occurred when reading a narrative of interest to the students. As a result, the students explored ideas and suggested alternative accounts; they were using language in authentic and meaningful ways.

Two categories of language use specific to English language learners emerged from the data that did not fit into the questioning categories. Both categories relate to how the teachers responded to the ELL students: one is the acceptance of the way responses were said, and the other is elaboration of student responses. I will discuss each of these categories next.

Acceptance of Speech

When ELL students use language in meaningful ways, the task can be linguistically challenging. Tatiana, in contrast to Kenton and Todd, was eager to respond to questions; however, she struggled with the cognitively demanding task of expressing herself in academic language. The effort required for Tatiana to do this is evident throughout the transcripts. In the middle of an explanation, Tatiana often said, "I don't know how to explain it" or her response was punctuated with "umm" and "uh." Irene accepted Tatiana's sometimes awkward explanations, and she tried hard to understand the

intended meaning. In the following example, the students read a poem about children around the world and how, despite differences, share similarities:

Irene:	OK. There are some things that are different amongst kids, right? But there are some things that are the same.
Tatiana:	Yeah, like some childrens are not born well.
Irene:	What do you mean, "not born well"?
Tatiana:	Like when their mother borns them, they can't talk very well and they have to sit on their...like some...I don't know how to explain!
Irene:	OK. So, are you thinking of children who are born with handicaps?
Tatiana:	Yeah!

I was unsure of Tatiana's meaning, but Irene was immediately aware of what she meant. Tatiana was able to grow in her language development through her use of language as well as Irene's clarification of her responses. The interaction became a supportive context.

On other occasions, Tatiana had difficulty pronouncing a word correctly. For example, when Irene asked, "Now on page 2, what is that?" in reference to the table of contents, Tatiana replied, "Oh. That's the Table of *Continents*" and did not realize her error until Irene gave an explanation of the difference between the two words. On another occasion, Irene insisted that Tatiana pronounce the word 'aquarium' correctly, despite her protests:

Tatiana:	I saw that at West Edmonton Mall! They have this...a—quaria—
Irene:	A-quar-i-um
Tatiana:	blah blah, yeah yeah
Irene:	Say it. A-quar-i-um.
Tatiana:	uh uh. I don't want to.
Irene:	Please
Tatiana:	(together with Irene) a-quar-i-um.
Irene:	There you go!
Tatiana:	Hah! ...And it's so big. And they have three sharks...

Tatiana verbalized her success ("Hah!") and through her responses, Tatiana was further developing her oral language skills and practicing expression of complex ideas.

Wynn also responded to the sometimes awkward or incorrect contributions of the ELL students. Her gentle prodding, acceptance and encouragement acted as a support for Kenton and Todd to express themselves verbally whether or not their response was correct. This is illustrated in the following two excerpts. In the first, the group had just discussed which animals are represented on Canadian coins. Then Wynn asked:

Wynn: My question is, why are all those pictures on our coins? Just like the United States has some pictures on their coins, why are those pictures on our coins in Canada? Angela?

Angela: Because some of them sort of refer to what Canada is like.

Wynn: Because they might represent what Canada is like! Well, the maple leaf is on our flag, right. And we have...Cam?

Cam: Um...we have those animals on there, because we, this land used to be owned by natives, and those animals represent...(unclear) of the natives.

Wynn: Thank you. Todd?

Todd: It might be the first animals that were seen...?

Wynn: Oh. OK. So, we still do have polar bears in the north, don't we, we have loons, we have beavers in Canada, and we have lots of maple leaves, and that's on our flag. What about the boat—anybody know why the boat would be on the dime? Todd?

Todd: Because those were machines that were only used.

Wynn: Those kinds of boats were used, yes. Anybody else? Cam?

The students' responses hint at why wildlife might be on Canadian coins, but do not quite capture the answer, and Todd's response was especially obscure. Perhaps he meant that the animals on our coins were often seen, rather than "first" seen. Wynn accepted his answer, which likely helped him feel that his response was valued and acceptable. When Todd gave his opinion about the boat on the dime, he said "…machines that were only

used." He likely meant "boat" for "machine," and his word order made the meaning unclear. Wynn rephrased his reply so that it was a viable answer—"Those kinds of boats were used, yes" while affirming Todd's response. In a later excerpt, Todd described the term "setting" as "The places where the story is going to take part…?" to which Wynn responded, "Exactly. The place, or places, where the story takes place." She repeated his answer while modeling correct English.

In the second excerpt, Wynn prompted Kenton to use accurate language. The students had been looking at the illustrations in the book, and Wynn had asked the students:

Wynn:	What do you notice about the farm? What do you notice about the setting on the page? Kenton?
Kenton:	It shows you most of the parts of the houses in the—
Wynn:	Are those buildings all houses?
Kenton:	Um-m-m-m...
Wynn:	What would the brown building be? (Samantha and Todd put their hands up.) No, wait, let Kenton figure it out.
Kenton:	Um-m-m-m...
Wynn:	This is a problem-solving...Look at the picture and look at all the items in the picture. And what would that brown building be?
Kenton:	Uh...

Kenton was unable to think of the word "barn" and referred to all of the buildings in the picture as "houses." Wynn urged Kenton to use accurate wording to describe the illustration, and when he still couldn't think of the word barn, she broke her question into smaller parts:

Wynn:	What's the white building...Kenton?
Kenton:	A house
Wynn:	A house. All right. Now take a look behind the house. What do you see?
Kenton:	Horses.

Wynn: Oh, and a little pond. Right? What do you see...? What do you think this building would be then? On a farm, you usually have a house, and what else?

Kenton: Uh.....a place where you keep the horses...and cows...?

Wynn: And what is that called?

Kenton: Uh-h-h

Wynn: Sometimes they're red. (pause) Todd?

Todd: barn...

Wynn: A barn. This barn isn't red, though, it's brown.

Other students in the group thought of the word, but Wynn persisted with Kenton until it became clear that he was not going to think of the word. She maintained high expectations of him to use accurate vocabulary.

Elaboration of Responses

Anderson and Roit (1996) suggest that teachers invite ELL students to elaborate their responses, and note that, "…language minority students tend to respond in few words, the less said, the less likely they will make an error." They add that, "Their reluctance to respond fully also limits opportunities for teachers to diagnose and help students solve comprehension problems" (p. 299).

In the following excerpt, Wynn was in tune to what Todd meant, and she also asked him to elaborate his answer:

Wynn: How about you Todd? Have you ever encouraged someone, someone in your family, like a brother or a sister or a cousin or something?

Todd: yeah.

Wynn: Who was it?

Todd: Yeah...I, uh, with his homework, I help him.

Wynn: Is this your brother?

Todd: It's my little brother.

Wynn: Oh, the one in kindergarten.

Todd: Yeah.

Wynn suggested answers within her question (brother, sister, cousin) and when Todd gave a one-word answer, she prodded him for more information. Wynn was aware of Todd's family situation when she asked, 'Is this your brother?' She had to read between the lines to decipher Todd's vague answer.

Wynn had asked the children how they knew they were good at particular sports. Todd had earlier said that he thought he was good at soccer.

Wynn: Todd?

Todd: Because sometimes I always played it [soccer].

Wynn: You play it a lot?

Todd: Yeah.

Wynn: Like soccer you play at recess all of the time?

Todd: Sometimes at lunch.

The excerpts above illustrate how one's intended meaning is situated in and mediated by context. Todd's vague answers required the listener to fill in the gaps. Wynn patiently drew him out, guessed what he might be referring to, and asked him to expand on his answer. A similar incident happened with Kenton. In the following excerpt, the group was discussing the cover of a new text.

Wynn: Who do you think 'Pa' is in the story? Kenton?

Kenton: (didn't volunteer) um-m-m.

Wynn: Who do you think Pa might be? (directed at Kenton)

Kenton: (points to picture of boy in corner) Him. [It probably isn't 'Pa' because it is a young boy, and 'Pa' implies an older person.]

Wynn: OK. Why do you think Pa is this person here? [She points to the picture of a boy.]

Kenton: (pause) 'Cause he is on the computer doing his emails.

Wynn: He is on the computer...it looks like he's using email, doesn't it?

Kenton did not immediately respond, so Wynn repeated her question allowing Kenton to think. She then accepted his response, even though it was incorrect. When Kenton gave his answer, I presume Wynn was thinking about what her next response should be as she accepted his answer with "OK." She then gave him an opportunity to elaborate his response and asked him why he thought the way he did. Giving ELL students opportunities to elaborate their response allows them to apply English in a real social context (Anderson & Roit, 1996; Gersten & Jimenez, 1994). The teacher can then gain insight into the students' thinking when she hears their elaborated answer. Kenton's answer above *did* make reasonable sense in that adults may be more likely to send emails than children. By accepting all answers, Wynn was enabling her students to be risk-takers. When students feel that their answers must be right, they are less likely to contribute an answer for fear of appearing foolish or making a mistake.

Tatiana's verbal and exuberant nature meant that Irene did not often need to encourage her to expand her responses, as in the excerpt below:

Irene:	Darren, what was the poem about?
Darren:	It's called 'Birthday Wish.'
Irene:	Yeah.
Tatiana:	(looking at the picture) Oh, look! I think the chil—all the children's in the world, in the world are different kinds like some people come from Ukraine, India and they're, and they're all holding hands and they move around the world.
Irene:	Mmmhmm. So, now the person who wrote it said, "the wish I ade was different than I, than the wish I planned to make. So—
Tatiana:	(interrupts) You can always change a wish!

Tatiana's willingness to contribute gave her practice using English in a social context. She was thinking aloud to clarify her intended meaning and this is the kind of talk that is especially valuable for children learning another language (Gibbons, 2002; Van den Branden, 2000).

Summary

Students must be given the opportunity to use language in order to develop their academic language proficiency (Cummins, 2001). When the teachers accepted how words were spoken, were in tune to the student's intended meaning, and encouraged the students to elaborate their responses, they were encouraging active language use. Effective questioning is also vital for language growth. In this study, type-one questions were beneficial to teach academic language and to help students with comprehension and understanding of the text. Type-two and -three questions, however, led to contexts that yielded rich communication.

Vygotsky (1934/1986) states that learning is a social endeavor; hence the dialogue prompted by type-two and –three questions tended to foster children's voices and peer interaction. Van den Branden (2002) refers to this as negotiation of meaning; Wells and Chang-Wells (1996) as collaborative talk. No matter the name, the ELL learners in this study benefited from contexts that prompted them to explore each other's ideas and ask their own questions. Contexts that offer opportunities to use language promote linguistic and cognitive growth, according to Cummins (2001). Therefore, it is important to ask what prompted the boys' increased participation. Exactly what created this context is difficult to determine, and the question becomes circular: did the narrative prompt open-ended questions, or did the open-ended questions prompt a deeper engagement with the text? I have suggested that the themes in *Miss Geneva's Lantern* (Lake, 1996) resonated with the students, but the story read at the beginning of this study, *Bowled Over* (Greenaway, 2002) with its themes of bullying and overcoming one's fears, could also lead to interesting questions and discussion. So, open-ended questions certainly invite collaborative talk, but there are also social and cultural factors at play. There needs to be a sense of belonging, a sense of feeling safe, a true engagement with the text. This theme will be explored further in the next chapter. For now, a guided reading context that promotes authentic language use appears to be a combination of an interesting text, open-ended questions, and a sense of safety in the community of readers.

I believe that there was another factor at play, or put another way, Vygotsky's (1934/1876) theory in action. Vygotsky suggests that what happens on the social level eventually is internalized, and that language is a mediator of higher mental processes. Initially Kenton and Todd were reluctant to share their thinking, but they became more willing to contribute as time progressed. The dialogue that occurred around texts at the beginning of this study was likely beneficial for Todd and Kenton in that they could hear the responses of other children. Despite their lack of response, they were still required to think and respond in whatever way they could. We know from Vygotsky's work that language is fundamental to thinking and it is through talk with others that the means for higher level thinking can be appropriated and constructed as a personal resource (Wells, 2001).

> Britton (1993) describes the benefits of talk for all children in the classroom:
> In a good conversation, the participants profit from their own talking...from what others contribute, and above all from the interaction—that is to say from the enabling effect of each upon the others. It is for these reasons an important mode of learning. (p. 239)

Exposure to language use in various contexts helps ELL students to learn the language. "It appears that what is essential is that learners have access to language that is appropriately modified for them, and is used in ways that allow learners to discover its formal and pragmatic properties" (Wong-Fillmore, 1991, p. 64). Cummins (2001) suggests that ELL students need access to competent users of the target language so that they can acquire the language, and they also need to be involved in communicative interaction that involves higher level and critical thinking. I propose that Todd and Kenton internalized the talk around them; therefore, time must be given for internalization to happen; to allow silence. Even though Todd and Kenton were not direct participants in the interaction, the talk and discussion was beneficial for their academic language growth. For instances like these, where authentic interaction and questioning are encouraged, the results seem to be beneficial for all learners.

CHAPTER 8
TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTIONS

There is more to a reading group than co-constructed meanings and comprehension, especially a reading group with culturally diverse learners. Other aspects contribute to the learning experiences that children have in the group context. Classrooms reflect unique sociocultural systems with their varied discourses and activities. Children from varied backgrounds who attend Canadian schools bring with them their personal histories, beliefs, customs and ways of being in the world and this affects literacy learning.

> The forms of language and literacy within each culture have developed over time to carry the concepts that reflect the experience of that cultural group. Thus, the historical condition is joined to the cultural condition, and links among historical, cultural, and individual conditions are formed when children are learning to use language and literacy. (Au, 1998, p. 298)

The previous chapters have suggested pedagogical practices when working with ELL students, and effective instruction must consider the human relationships within which these practices are embedded. Cummins' (2001) takes this relationship into account in his framework which places teacher-student interactions at the center. He states that these interactions "must affirm students' cultural, linguistic, and personal identities in order to create classroom conditions for maximum identity investment in the learning process" (p. 126).

I looked at the teacher-student interactions in my data, and after general open-coding, noticed that there were two broad categories of teacher-student interactions that supported construction of meaning. The first category accounts for what happened in the zone of proximal development, when the teacher supported the students' learning by, for example, teaching specific reading strategies, using graphic organizers, or probing and questioning to deepen understanding. Cummins (2001) terms interactions such as these "cognitive engagement" (p. 125). For the second category, I looked at interactions that affirmed the student as well as social positioning in the group, for example, when

students were encouraged to share cultural stories or knowledge. I entitled this "cultural identity and a sense of belonging;" Cummins terms this "identity investment." I discuss each of these categories next.

Cognitive Engagement

ELL students are faced with two learning tasks in the context of guided reading: literacy development and language development. Consequently, ELL students may struggle with the dual demands of learning English and constructing meaning. At times, the adults in this study engaged the students in cognitively demanding tasks that involved inference, analysis or synthesis of the text. The adults also helped the students to comprehend the text in the form of communicative supports, reading strategies and graphic organizers. Communicative supports included asking questions, explaining or re-reading portions of the text and allowing the students to talk their way to understanding.

Communicative Supports

The excerpt below illustrates how Wynn's questions provided assistance in helping the students comprehend the text. Wynn had asked the students why a character would have written a thank you note to another character.

Wynn:	Why was Inez thanking Miss Geneva?
Todd:	Oh!
Wynn:	Todd?
Todd:	She helped ..,Miss Geneva helped her find her way home.
Wynn:	Miss Geneva did help her when she stumbled in the road. Angela?
Angela:	She helped her find her way in the dark, and...?
Wynn:	That's right. Is there another reason why Inez might thank Miss Geneva? (pause) Was Inez afraid of Mr. Boone? [students nod]
Wynn:	And what did Miss Geneva tell her?
Angela:	That ghosts won't hurt children...?

Wynn: Right, because ghosts don't harm good people and children, right? Do you think Inez might be thanking her for that? For a number of things...

Kenton: Now she knows that haints won't harm her.

Wynn: Right! Very good.

Wynn was building on the students' responses by asking questions and directing the students to useful information. Language was used as a support to help students extend their thinking.

Irene used language in the excerpt below to explain a poem which was written from the perspective of a girl who did everything perfectly. The poem read,

I don't know how my mother knows,
she makes her bed and folds her clothes,
and does her homework every day
before she goes outside to play.

The students thought that the mother was doing the chores, when in fact it was the daughter. Irene had asked why the girl next door was a goodie-good, and then she became aware of the students' confusion:

Tatiana: Because her mom makes her bed and folds her clothes and does her homework every day.

Irene: Oh OK. Her mom does that? Let's read this.

Tatiana: No her, her mom I think...

Irene: (re-reads aloud) "I don't know how my mother knows..."

Tatiana: So, uh...she has to be like respect.

Darren: Oh!

Irene: Darren?

Darren: She's acting like a kid.

Irene: Who's acting like a kid? Nancy Fedder?

Darren: Yeah.

Tatiana: But she is a kid.

Irene: OK. It is a little bit, um, deceiving. It's hard to understand what the words are saying here when it says, "I don't know how my mother knows." So the person who wrote the poem is saying, suppose I wrote the poem, I'm saying, I don't know how my mom knows that she, which means Nancy Fedder, that Nancy Fedder makes her bed, folds her clothes and does her homework every day before she goes outside to play.

Irene's explanation helped Darren understand, but Tatiana was still confused. Irene supported Tatiana's thinking by permitting her to talk her way to understanding:

Irene: OK. So Nancy Fedder makes her bed, folds the clothes, does her homework. What kind of person...what do you call a person like that? Tatiana?

Tatiana: Uhhh. Well, she does her homework every day.

Irene: Mmmhmm.

Tatiana: That's good.

Irene: That's true. It is good.

Tatiana: And she folds her clothes, she, her, I bet her room isn't messy.

Irene: That's right. Probably not.

Tatiana: And I think that this girl doesn't have time to play because she, I mean she does have time to play.

Irene: Mmmhmm.

Tatiana: Like, uh, first thing she does, she plays on the computer or watches TV and makes...or bedtime she has to do her homework...

Irene: Do you get that idea that she waits to do her homework until the very end of the day? It says... "and does her homework every day, before she goes outside to play."

Tatiana: So, she does her homework first, to me.

Irene: Mmmhmm. OK, think about it. I'm the person who wrote this and I'm sitting here saying I don't know how my mom knows that

Nancy Fedder makes her bed, folds her clothes, does her homework. She lives right next door, and she does all those great things and what do you think my Mom is saying to me?

Tatiana: Oh, you should be like her.

Irene: Yes, yes.

Finally, Tatiana understood as a result of the explanation and the conversation in which Irene let Tatiana verbalize her thinking.

Reading Strategies

The purpose of the guided reading group is to develop the children's reading abilities while reading a text at the students' instructional level. The teacher's role when working with ELL students is to help them engage with the text and monitor their comprehension, teach reading strategies, and discuss the selection (Roit, 2006). Children become better readers when they are able to monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own thinking processes when they read. Wynn often referred to the QAR reading strategy (question answer relationships) (Raphael & Au, 2005), which is a strategy children can use when asked questions about a text. The strategy makes explicit the notion that some answers are found directly in the text, whereas other answers involve integrating background knowledge with information in the text. Wynn often referred to the QAR strategy during the guided reading time:

Wynn: I just want to point out, that when you come to the questions, some of the questions will be from your head. You won't find the answers in the book. You're going to have to think about them.

In the excerpt below, Cam had asked a question about a legend the students had read. The transcript illustrates the use of the QAR reading strategy, as well as teacher scaffolding.

Wynn: Cam asked a very good question yesterday. He said, 'Why did she have to take the children with her?'

Cam: And turn them into stone.

Wynn: Why couldn't she have left the children with their father? Do you know why? [Children listen attentively and look around at each other.]

Angela: I have an idea why...

Wynn: This is an answer that is maybe partly from your head and partly from the book. There is something in the book that gives you a hint. 'K? Would you like me to find it for you? Or can you figure it out?

Cam: I know!

Wynn: Don't say anything yet. [She looks through the book.] Um...page 26. The middle paragraph. The paragraph right in the middle? Just read that over once again, and see if you can find out the idea that's behind why she had to do that. [Children read silently. The actual text reads:

The chieftain's wife became very sad. Huge tears rolled down her cheeks, for now that the shawl's hiding place had been revealed to her, she knew she must find it and return to the sea. For once the shawl was unearthed she would most certainly turn back into a mermaid, and the sea would take back all she'd had on land. (The Seven Stones of Sligo, Smith, 2001)]

Cam: OH!

Wynn: Just wait until everyone has read it. ... OK? Kenton?

Kenton: Because when she goes back to a mermaid, and back to the sea, everything she had on land has to go back to the sea?

As the discussion unfolded, I could feel the attention and excitement of the students as they looked for the answer to Cam's question. It was clear that this aspect of the story had not been completely understood. The students needed to infer the answer; "All she'd had on land" meant that the children had to return with her to the sea. Wynn mentioned the QAR strategy to help the students discern the answer and allowed time for *all* of the

students to read and think about the text. The native English speakers were anxious to respond (Angela had an idea before they read the text, and Cam said, "I know!") Instead of allowing them to answer, she suggested a page to reread which gave the ELL students time and opportunity to answer the question. The native English speakers seemed to benefit as well; Cam's "OH!" after reading the selection seems to indicate that he may initially have had the incorrect answer. Wynn was able to support their learning by pointing out that the answer was "partly from your head and partly from the book" and as a result of the discussion, both native English speakers and ELL students were better able to understand nuances of the text. The vocabulary of QAR--In the Book, In My Head, Right There, Think & Search, Author & Me and On My Own—provides students, especially students of diverse backgrounds, the language needed to discuss strategies that involve higher level thinking skills.

The exchange above represents one of the few instances of scaffolding that occurred in this study. I have termed this example scaffolding because the question was initiated by a student and Wynn built on Cam's question. The metaphorical term "scaffolding" was first coined by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), who used it to describe the interaction between an adult and a child as the adult assisted a child to carry out a task just beyond the child's capability. As a result of the assistance, a child was able to move toward new levels of understanding, or acquire new skills and concepts. Just as buildings are constructed through a temporary structure (a scaffold) which is taken down once a portion of the building is complete, so too adults remove their assistance once learners are able to complete tasks on their own. Wood et al. analyzed the verbal interaction of mothers reading to their children, and noted that they did not simply tell the child words, for example, but through subtle questioning and talk, supported or "scaffolded" the child in his or her learning. Language was used as a tool to scaffold or lift the child's performance to the next level.

In the classroom, scaffolding is not simply another word for *help,* but rather it is the support teachers give students in order to carry out tasks successfully and move them toward new skills, concepts, or levels of understanding (Gibbons, 2002). Two other

points are important to note: the ZPD is constantly changing as the child develops, and the ZPD is different for every student. For example, some children require very little assistance to make gains in learning, while for others, much more help is required. These points may seem obvious, but they are important to consider because teachers may impose their own structure on the student rather than allowing children to initiate topics or to shape the experience for themselves. "Too often, the teacher is the builder and the child is expected to accept and occupy a predetermined structure" (Searle, 1984, p. 482). Successful tutors respond to what the student is attempting to do; they "follow the contours of a child's growth" (Graves, 1983, p. 271). Therefore, teachers must be aware of each child's independent achievements in order to provide learning experiences which are slightly ahead of the child's capabilities, which Bodrova & Leong (1996) term "developmentally appropriate practice." The structure of guided reading, in which the teacher leads and controls the dialogue, does not lend itself to scaffolding. Instead, students are required to follow the teacher's lead. This transcript was noteworthy because a student asked a question, and clearly the rest of the students in the guided reading group were interested in finding the answer.

Graphic Organizers

Another technique that helped with comprehension was the use of graphic organizers. The staff at this particular school used thinking maps to teach students how to organize information. There was a choice of eight different "maps" to choose from, depending on the activity (See Appendix C). The "bubble map" (a circle in the middle of the paper, with circles added around its periphery) is used to write descriptive words about a topic, and a "flow map" shows sequence. Students in Wynn's group were asked to produce both of these graphic organizers during this study. The bubble map was drawn to describe two of the characters in *Bowled Over* (Greenaway, 2002) and Wynn asked the students to do a flow map after reading the book about planning a birthday party. Todd and Kenton were interesting to watch when asked to do the thinking maps. Both boys did not write immediately, but looked around, played with their pencils, looked in the book

for information, and took a significant amount of time before writing. Descriptive words are supposed to be written in the bubbles, but both boys wrote words as well as phrases to describe actions, such as "almost got strike," and "good at bowling" as well as descriptive words, such as "nice" and "helpful." Kenton, for example, wrote: "Harry" in the middle circle, and the following descriptors in the circles surrounding "Harry:" "bully," "pest," "mean," "bad bowler," and "lies." Todd wrote: "hates Callum's shoes," "mean at class," and "nice with family." The bubble maps were shared among the students the next day. The benefit of this strategy for Kenton and Todd was that they had time to think and look for answers before speaking in front of their peers. Creating the maps also required the students to reflect as they read, and to synthesize information from the text to add to their map.

The graphic organizers provided a structure through which the students could organize information and ideas. The literature on ELL students suggests that semantic mapping, or webbing is valuable for ELL students because the framework provides a literacy support that helps students to access meanings. "For second language students, the networks of ideas that are captured in webs and concept maps highlight vocabulary and provide a concrete representation of information in a way that illustrates connections between concepts" (Spangenberg-Urbschat & Pritchard, 2003, p. 146). In addition, the activity was nonverbal, which allowed students time to think and to express themselves in writing. The graphic organizers are a visual tool, which can help ELL students "visualize the abstractions of language" and increase learning (Gersten & Baker, 2000, p. 463). They note that the spoken word is fleeting, whereas "visual aids such as graphic organizers, concept and story maps, and word banks give students a concrete system to process, reflect on, and integrate information" (Gersten & Baker, 2000, p. 463). Despite the benefits of graphic organizers outlined above, Kenton and Todd struggled with the activity. The words and phrases that they chose to write were not quite appropriate for the bubble map.

Cultural Identity and a Sense of Belonging

The basic purpose of school is achieved through communication (Cazden, 2001). Students must make sense of what the teacher presents to them, and their spoken language becomes an important part of their school identity. Cazden notes that descriptions of classroom interaction are especially important to our understanding of ELL students. Language learning is much more than a mental process occurring in the brains of individual learners; rather, language learning is a process entrenched in its sociocultural contexts.

Packer and Goicoechea (2000) suggest that sociocultural theory can be explicated by exploring six ontological themes underlying the theory. These themes are that "(a) the person is constructed, (b) in a social context, (c) formed through practical activity, (d) and formed in relationships of desire and recognition, (e) that can split the person, (f) and motivating the search for identity (p. 228)." In other words, "a person is made not born" (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 231) as he/she interacts with his/her environment. A sociocultural perspective recognizes that "people shape the social world, and in doing so are themselves transformed" (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 234). For English language learners, the gap between self and other may be significant when they enter the classroom context, leading to a split in identity and the resultant search for a new emergent identity as they try to find their way between two cultures.

In schools, patterns of interaction are culturally organized. Vygotsky's (1934/1986) theory of learning and development suggests that learning is a form of language socialization between individuals. Participation in social activities is mediated by the use of language; it is the tool mediating actions and situations. Therefore, the pivotal role that the social context of interaction plays for ELL students with respect to both identity and learning cannot be overlooked. As mentioned in chapter 2, children are expected to figure out the discourse of school: the purpose, meaning, and rules of participation that go along with the many kinds of talk, such as instructions, questions, small talk, explanations, discussions, greetings and negotiations. In addition, home

languages are often not encouraged in the context of school, with the result that students feel that their language and culture are not important.

During the study, I did not hear the focal children speak their first language; however, I did not witness a concerted effort to suppress the home languages either. When I asked the focal children to share with me their home language, Kenton and Todd declined, and Tatiana said, "No way." Kenton said, "I'm shy whenever I say something." I asked Kenton why he did not use his language at school, and he replied, "I only speak [it] at home." He acknowledged that he spoke English with his siblings, but Chinese to his parents who did not understand much English. At some point in their short careers in school, Kenton, Todd and Tatiana had internalized that home languages were inappropriate at school.

In an interview with Tatiana, I asked what it was like for her when she moved to Canada in Grade 1 and she had to learn English. She replied that it was "embarrassing...it was so hard." 'Embarrassing' is an interesting choice of word which suggests that she felt uncomfortable and self-conscious at school because she did not know the language of instruction. On more than one occasion, I mentioned to the focal children that the ability to speak other languages was impressive, and that they were fortunate to know another language. I asked Tatiana if she was proud that she knew two languages, and she replied, "Mmm. Not really," but by the end of the study, she agreed to say "It's nice outside" in Romanian, and insisted on printing some Romanian words for me.

Social Positioning in the Guided Reading Groups

Talk enables children to contribute to social aspects of school life, and, at other times, talk is used for academic purposes. In this study, the students needed to participate appropriately in the context of the guided reading event where the teacher asked the questions and nominated who should answer them.

Cultural identity and a sense of belonging are strongly interconnected; if English language learners feel that their cultural identity is recognized, then they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging. Although there is overlap of cultural identity and social

positioning, the excerpts I share below describe Kenton, Todd, and Tatiana's social positioning, followed by a discussion of cultural identity.

Reading is an interpretive process that is influenced not only by the reader's background knowledge, experience and understanding, but also by the interactions around text that help learners construct meaning. Therefore, meaning has both a cultural face and a social face. The cultural face includes the experiences and the identities of the students as well as the expectations of the classroom, and the social face includes the give and take of classroom talk These interactions are affected by children's view of themselves, formed by their perceptions of how others accept them, as well as their competence in completing tasks during reading events. As a result, a kind of hierarchy or social positioning forms based on the relationships between teacher, peer and self. What is learned is shaped by the kinds of position each student occupies (Toohey, 2000). ELL students try to understand their social worlds and their place in them, as do all students, as they struggle to develop their voices in particular social contexts (Toohey, 2000). The social relations among the learners, the conversations the students engaged in, and the behaviour that was valued and expected during reading events all contributed to the resultant social positioning that occurred.

The teacher sets the tone for how she expects talk to happen in her classroom, and then students participate within those parameters. Wynn had rules governing when students could speak in class and when they could not, and she consistently enforced those rules. There were times when students were expected to raise their hands if they wanted to participate, such as during guided reading and class discussions, and other times when the students could talk freely (and quietly) amongst themselves, such as when the children read and ate their morning snack. I looked at the social interactions and behaviours of the focal children to try to determine their social positioning and its effect on their interpretation and understanding of text. I looked for instances when the focal children offered a response without nomination, interrupted talk, asked their own questions and interacted with peers, or conversely, were silent. I also paid attention to the reactions of others, as well as non-verbal actions (e.g. watching others) and the intonation

of what was spoken. As is required by their district's program of guided reading, Wynn and Irene nominated who would speak after posing questions about the text. For the most part, Kenton and Todd either contributed (or not) when called upon, whereas Tatiana was an active participant in her group. I will elaborate on each focal student's behaviour next, but I also include the behaviour of Cam, who provides an illuminating foil to Kenton and Todd's responses in their particular reading group.

Kenton

Kenton listened intently to the teacher and tried hard to participate in the dialogue. He occasionally volunteered responses, although he most often responded when it was his turn. Sometimes his answers were incorrect, or his answer ended with an inflection indicating uncertainty about the validity of his response. On a few occasions, he had the confidence to ask questions, and to correct the teacher about a detail in the book. For the most part, he was a keen observer and polite listener who appeared slightly unsure of himself. He was better able to participate when he had background knowledge about the topic of conversation. Kenton was well aware of the rules of the group, and attempted to help the teacher with her maintenance of order by answering when called upon, and by keeping a close eye on Cam. One day, Cam was reading when he was supposed to be completing a bubble map, and Kenton watched him with consternation and then pointed out to him what he was "supposed" to be doing. Whereas the other children were curious about Cam's behavior, Kenton was clearly uncomfortable when Cam did not do as the teacher asked and he often tried to correct the newcomer's behaviour.

Kenton interacted sociably with those around him when the children were working on individual assignments after reading. He sometimes made comments about his progress ("I know something about Harry.") or pointed out aspects of the text that he found interesting. When the students needed glue sticks one day, Kenton could not find one that worked from the bin where they were kept. He used the incident to verbalize his difficulty to the others, with a hint of frustrated humour. He was pleased when they

laughed at his antics. Kenton clearly wanted to belong, he wanted relate to the others, and he wanted to please the teacher.

There was a shift in Kenton's level of participation as the study progressed. At the beginning of the study, he would occasionally volunteer a comment or question, but by the end of the study he was noticeably more interactive. There are a few examples of his increased interaction in the previous chapter, but I include another excerpt here which also took place near the end of the study. Kenton volunteered an answer and asked a question about a new text:

Wynn:	Why is the soil of Bali so rich?
Kenton:	Because of the lava that came down out of the volcano...
Todd:	Because of the lava that came down out of the volcano, it makes really good soil.
Wynn:	It travels over the ground, and seeps into the ground and makes really good dirt.
Kenton:	If you dig to the very bottom, you see the lava...?
Wynn:	Only in the volcano would it be active...

He continued to be an active participant in subsequent guided reading sessions, and appeared to gain confidence and become more of a risk-taker. He had learned the discourse of the guided reading group, and tried to participate in it.

Todd

Todd was a quiet participant in the guided reading group. He did not make small talk with those around him, but was engrossed in reading, or listening to and observing what was going on around him. There were guided reading sessions when he spoke so little that I had to check my notes to see if he had been absent that day. He often replied with one-word answers or did not have an answer, despite the teacher's repetition of questions and wait time. When he did reply, the response was soft-spoken, and like Kenton, the response ended in an inflection. There were times when Todd's answer was not correct due to a misunderstanding of word meaning, as in the example shared earlier

about coin collecting. One wonders how his display of "not knowing" affected others' view of him, as well as his view of himself. However, Todd did not appear uncomfortable with his level of participation; rather, he seemed to me to be quiet and reflective. This may be, in part, due to his age; he is still young enough to be unconcerned about peer approval. In later grades, his incorrect responses may provoke teasing and bullying.

His style of participation may have reflected behaviour expected in his home culture, or the Discourse (Gee, 1996) of home. Au (2002) recommends that teachers practice culturally responsive instruction: "teaching that reflects the values and standards for behavior of students' home cultures (p. 404)." She refers to her research with Hawaiian children who interacted more effectively with the text when engaged in a speech event known in the home culture as "talk story." Instead of the conventional IRE interaction, the teachers asked a question and then allowed any students to respond. The result was often overlapping speech as students interpreted the text. The students collaborated to answer the question much like the cooperation that is valued in Hawaiian families. Todd may have felt more comfortable participating in a small group situation, or with a partner. Au adds that students need to be taught the traditional way of interacting valued in classrooms as well, so that they can participate appropriately in school settings. This idea echoes Cummins' (2001) and Delpit's (1988) view that ELL children need to be explicitly shown how the language works, and the rules for interaction.

Wynn continually encouraged Todd, and, like Kenton, his participation changed near the end of the study. Todd did not contribute questions and comments as Kenton did, but instead became braver by echoing the responses of those around him, especially Kenton, as seen in the example below:

Wynn:	What do you think, Todd? Do you like the pictures?
Todd:	Yeah.
Kenton:	You could make a movie of this book.
Wynn:	Why? How?
Todd:	Because it's a scary story.
Kenton:	You could make it into a scary movie.

Todd: Yeah.

Wynn: Do you like scary movies?

Todd: Yeah.

Kenton: They are sometimes funny.

When discussing a black cat, Angela commented, "It has yellow eyes." and Todd echoed, "Yeah, it's yellow." Todd blurted out "Oh!" during an exchange near the end of the study, just as Cam often did, and he showed more involvement and interest by saying "Uh..." when the teacher asked a question. He appeared to be appropriating the language that he had heard or read. For example, he used such terms as "fine house," "rich soil," and "frozen as an ice cube." He, too, was learning the discourse of school by internalizing the social actions of those around him and trying to become a part of the group.

Todd and Kenton seemed to share a bond; whether due to similar cultural backgrounds, to friendship, or aspects of both is difficult to determine. On many occasions, the boys talked quietly together while others were reading. Kenton initiated these conversations, including comments about the pictures ("She looks shocked"), the content ("Did you read this? It tells you right here."), and interesting aspects of the book ("Look. This chapter only has one page!"). Todd always responded positively by agreeing, or sharing in the observation. They seemed to take care of each other, Kenton by helping Todd, and Todd by agreeing with Kenton. On one occasion, the children had been talking about potluck parties, and someone mentioned that they had eaten sushi. When Wynn asked Todd if he liked sushi, he replied that he had not tried it yet. Kenton looked at him in surprise, and then reminded him that he *had* tried sushi. He said quietly, "Remember last year when we brought dishes to school and we all had a party?" The boys seemed to be like-thinkers; it was not unusual for the boys to reply in unison to a question. The presence of the other seemed to add confidence. The other children in the group did not share this closeness; Cam was new to the classroom, and Angela and Samantha were in different grades. Although Angela and Samantha were friendly to each other, they did not interact with each other during guided reading. Much is revealed about

the social positioning of Kenton and Todd when their actions and responses are contrasted with those of Cam, which I elaborate on next.

Counterpoint

I use the word *counterpoint* to describe Cam's actions and contributions, which were often in opposition to what was expected and encouraged in the guided reading context. His response was often more detailed and seldom had a questioning inflection at the end, demonstrating confidence. He was not afraid to challenge Wynn's comments, but was ignored when he interrupted, likely to teach him the rule of hand-raising in the group, as in this excerpt:

Wynn: Now, when you bowl sometimes you need special bowling shoes. And you can rent bowling shoes at the bowling alley—

Cam: Or you can just buy some.

Wynn: They have kind of a flat surface on the bottom so that you can slide if you have to—

Angela: Because if you have different shoes at the bowling alley, you will really slide a lot.

At times his comments appeared argumentative. For example, the group had been talking about parties, and Cam said:

Cam: You know what? I went to this huge party with the neighbourhood and the whole block came!

Wynn: It's called a block party? Yeah.

Cam: It actually wasn't a block party, but every single friend that I had on the block, even the ones that moved away, came to my party.

I am not sure why Cam did not agree with the teacher, when it appeared that he was referring to a block party. He chose to argue the point, using overstatements ("every single friend") as well as changing "the" party to "his" party. Another time, the students were reading an Australian legend about a pheasant and a kingfisher. One character was "Book Book;" the other "Bered-Bered," and there was some confusion about who was

who. The students seem to have the characters figured out, but Wynn had them switched. The following argument ensued:

Wynn:	But Book Book, what bird is he?
Cam:	He's the pheasant. So I was right.
Wynn:	Book Book is not the pheasant. He's got the short beak, so he must be—
Cam:	Pheasant. He's the pheasant.
Wynn:	No...that's not a pheasant.
Angela:	That is a pheasant.
Wynn:	That's not the pheasant.
Angela:	It says on the paper that Book Book is the pheasant.
Wynn:	This is the pheasant—he's got the long beak.
Angela:	It says Book Book is the pheasant.
Wynn:	Oh OK! I'm sorry. I was talking about the beak. He's got the long beak.
Cam:	No, that's the short—
Kenton:	Look at the back. [Referring to the back of the book.]

Cam's comment, "So I was right" indicates that being "right" was important to him. The students were able to negotiate the meaning with their teacher, but initially only Angela and Cam participated in the argument. Kenton interjected by telling his peers and the teacher to look at the back of the book to find the answer.

Due to his verbal nature and background knowledge, he knew more than the others in his group and on occasion, Wynn tapped into his expertise. In the legend referred to above, a fire was purposefully set to grass, and Wynn genuinely wondered why this would be. She asked Kenton, with whom she was reading, "Do you have any idea why they would set fire to the grass?" She then asked the question of other students in the group. Todd suggested that perhaps the fire could help them to see at night, but Wynn did not sound convinced when she responded, "That's a good idea." Cam was unaware the question was asked because he had been sent to his desk to read alone.

Wynn deferred to Cam, "Cam, do you know why they would be burning grass?" Cam appropriately replied, "Um, because to make new grass grow, or they could be doing it just to be mean, but they aren't mean, so I think it is to make the grass grow." Kenton and Todd listened attentively, and Wynn responded sincerely, "Oh! ...I'm just asking because I really don't know exactly why they were doing that. But that's a very good thought there!"

Cam was reflective and engaged with the text. He had the confidence to ask questions as they popped into his head. After reading the legend about the seven stones of Sligo, he asked,

Cam: Is there actually seven stones there?

Wynn: I don't know. I don't even know if there is a place called Sligo. I haven't looked it up.

Cam: There is!....probably.

Other times, he would simply blurt out, "What is mineral water?" or "Which one is the pheasant?" He often interjected with a conversational comment ("I know! Because I'm part Irish!" or "This whole question, it doesn't make sense to me.") When Wynn asked a question to which he didn't know the answer, he immediately said, "I don't know!" --a comment in stark contrast to Todd's deep silences. Cam was often excited about the text. When the group was reading about planning a birthday party, Cam was thrilled about a cake cut to look like a computer. He interrupted Wynn who was reading with Todd, to say, "Where did you get this book? Know what? I just want to do this for my uncle 'cause he works with computers, he fixes them, he takes them apart to see if there's ...like a wire or something like that..." Wynn offered to copy the page for him, and he replied, "Yeah. That's what I need, that's just what I need." On another occasion, while Wynn was giving directions for answering written questions about a book on coins, he suddenly remarked, "Did you know that the coin factory makes...makes 1 million coins an hour?" He was obviously amazed, and added, "That means they can make 24 million coins in a day!" Clearly, Cam was able to respond aesthetically to the text, and was not afraid to verbalize his personal connections.

Even though Cam was at times provocative, he provided a model for what interactive, engaged reading looked like with his spontaneous, confident, verbal responses to the text. His outbursts were usually ignored, and I wonder if Kenton and Todd internalized that spontaneous comments were not rewarded, and so were less likely to speak what was on their mind. But at the same time, I could see that Kenton and Todd were absorbing Cam's comments and insights. They watched him closely, and listened to what he had to say with avid attention. His behaviour may have contributed to the higher levels of participation that Kenton and Todd engaged in by the end of the study.

These subtle nuances in interactional patterns reveal the social positioning that Kenton and Todd held. They were listeners and observers more than contributors, tentatively feeling out a place for themselves in the English-speaking community of the classroom. Their lack of background knowledge about text content at times necessitated that they be passive observers and listeners; when the boys lacked experience, there was not much to say. They also did not trust their own knowledge, evidenced by the frequent inflections at the end of their responses. However, more involvement at the end of the two month period suggests that Kenton and Todd were gradually gaining control over language for interpersonal (social) purposes. Vygotsky (1934/1986) suggests that the social (intermental) eventually becomes individual (intramental) through social interaction with others. The joint participation in the guided reading group, the observation of Cam's responses, and the assistance provided by the teacher eventually contributed to Todd and Kenton becoming more involved in the verbal interactions of the group.

Tatiana

Tatiana and Darren were active participants in their reading group. They would initially remember to raise their hand, and then subsequent responses were often spontaneous. Michael and Brenda were quiet, so were often nominated to answer. For instance, Irene would say, "Michael, I know your hand isn't up but I'm going to ask you..." or "Everybody's hands should be up. Brenda, I'm going to ask you even though

your hand's not up." On many occasions Brenda was absent, leaving Michael as the passive observer and listener to Irene, Tatiana and Darren's conversations.

When I looked at the social interactions and behaviour of Tatiana in her reading group, what struck me the most was her confidence and her verbosity. She always attempted an answer, was able to volunteer responses, and was not afraid to make mistakes. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, she often related the topic of discussion to her personal experience. In the excerpt below, Tatiana related her knowledge of a poem to one she had recently read:

Irene: OK. Tatiana. What do you think a poem is?

Tatiana: A poem is a made up story, maybe that tells mean things that's because they have a poem for Valentine's Day...There's a girl I don't like, she smiles at me and then she kicked me and punched me in the nose.

Irene: And that's a poem you heard for Valentine's Day?

Tatiana: Yeah. It's right here. [She went to get it and read it aloud.]

Before Irene could stop her, she went to retrieve the poem so that she could share it with the group. Tatiana's responses sometimes lacked the sophistication of a native speaker, but Irene could discern what she meant. "And that's a poem you heard for Valentine's Day?" Irene asked, indicating that she was in tune to Tatiana's frame of reference. Irene listened for the meaning of Tatiana's words, rather than correcting her grammar. Because Tatiana's contributions were always accepted and valued for their meaning, she was willing to continue to respond.

Tatiana was vivacious and animated. Her smiles, giggles, and almost flirtatious manner made her an engaging member of the group. She was excitable, and sometimes loud. Tatiana's comments made her transparent in whatever she was thinking and feeling. When she was disappointed she would say, "Oh ma-a-an;" when she was bored, she would mutter, "I can't stand it." She was often dramatic in her facial and verbal expressions ("Ewww" or "Oh, oh, oh!"). These qualities of her personality also made her a leader and an initiator. She could almost take control of the guided reading group by

suggesting who should read next, switching the topic of conversation, or subtly reprimanding Irene for forgetting to check some information on the Internet:

Tatiana: Did you check on the Internet?

Irene: Oh! I forgot! I'm sorry!

Tatiana: Oh ma-an!

Irene: I was trying to get spelling words, and I forgot all about the Internet.

Tatiana: Do you have an office?

Irene: Well, I have a desk in Ms. Grassick's room, and I have a computer there.

Tatiana: Well, you can work on Ms. Gosse's right now. How hard will that be?

She displayed an interest and curiosity in the experiences of others, especially Irene. When Irene talked about childhood diseases, Tatiana asked, "Did you ever had it?" "Was it itchy?" and in a later reference to needles, Tatiana asked, "How did it feel?" Irene responded conversationally with, "It was very itchy. I don't remember feeling really, really sick. I got a little bit of a fever..." Tatiana then commented, "I'm scared of needles. You know what makes me scared? Because she just, the lady, um she had such a big needle. Oh my, and she put it in my...I screamed so much. It hurt. I'm afraid of needles." Irene did not ignore the comment and push forward with the reading, but rather responded again conversationally, "Oh, that's too bad. I don't like needles much myself, but I just look away if they're doing it on this arm..." The authentic conversations that took place, as well as Tatiana's outgoing personality, contributed to her growing social skills. Tatiana was learning how to interact, share, and verbalize her thoughts.

Tatiana often correctly inferred the meaning of the texts read. In my field notes, I have written more than once, "she gets it!" in the margins of Tatiana's talk. For instance, after the students had read a poem, Irene asked, "So, what are some things you noticed while Darren read this?" Tatiana replied correctly and immediately with this inference: "This is a poem that, to not put down people? Like to not laugh at them when they're

reading." There were also times when she was incorrect in her assumptions, but this did not seem to dampen her enthusiasm or ability to respond:

Irene: What is that part saying to us? Tatiana?

Tatiana: That...everyone was a child...and childrens have fun? And everyone should have a home?

Irene: Does it say that?

Tatiana: No.

Irene: It says we all share just one home, and they're saying the home is the planet Earth, not the house we live in.

She was not afraid to express her confusion when the text did not make sense to her. In the excerpt below, the line in the poem read, "I hope your sick gerbil's OK." Tatiana read the line and said, "That doesn't make sense! She should have wrote more words. Your gerbils *are* OK. Not OK, gerbils OK." Irene studied the sentence, and explained: "See the apostrophe 's'? On gerbils? That stands for gerbil *is* OK." There were many instances when Tatiana articulated her confusion, indicating that she was comfortable and confident enough to do so.

The students in this guided reading group interacted with Irene, and seldom amongst themselves; although on occasion, Darren and Tatiana would argue about the meaning of the text, as in the excerpt below. The group had read about sea life, and discussed why an octopus shoots out jets of ink.

Tatiana: Oh, it says somewhere here, he sometimes makes himself...camouflage?

Darren: No, it doesn't.

Tatiana: Yeah...it does! And the—

Irene: Find the sentence that says that.

Most comments, however, were directed to Irene, and the students viewed her as a source of knowledge. When discussing why the author used the words "itchy scritchy" to describe the chicken pox, for example, Darren asked Irene, "Why don't *you* tell us?" On another occasion, when Irene admitted to not knowing something about a character in the

book, the students registered surprise. Tatiana gasped and remarked, "I thought you knew!"

Tatiana's social positioning was one of leader and initiator. She was a self-assured and eager participant in her guided reading group, and her personality made her a dominant force within the group. Because of her confidence, she was able to build on her already burgeoning language skills by verbalizing whatever was on her mind.

To become an advanced speaker of a language means to be able to control one's social and cognitive activities. The three focal children occupied different social positions within their respective reading groups. Whereas Tatiana was confident, Kenton and Todd were still in the process of developing their voices and establishing a place for themselves within the group. A close look at how the social activities were organized sheds light on how the ELL students were developing as speakers and participants. Tatiana's gestures, giggles, outbursts and insights were accepted and acknowledged, possibly because her personality demanded that she be listened to, but also because she dominated her reading group, including Irene, who often stopped to hear what Tatiana had to say. Kenton and Todd, both quieter participants, were hesitant to contribute in a setting where others had elaborate responses and experiences. Despite their uncertainty, the boys were slowly finding a more secure place within their reading group where they were able to risk participation. "Becoming proficient at literacy viewed as a set of social practices is largely a matter of participating in them...what are learnt in terms of literacy are not so much cognitive skills but ways of social belonging" (van Enk, Dagenais & Toohey, 2005, p. 498).

Cultural Identity: Kenton, Todd and Tatiana

Tatiana often made connections to her personal experiences, some of which related to her family's cultural practices. For example, when the students discussed what they had done for the Easter weekend, Tatiana mentioned that her family had stayed up until midnight, eaten with friends and had attended church. She also told me, during an individual interview, that when someone died in her family, relatives were not allowed to

dance or go to parties for forty days. Other than these instances, there were no other situations in which Tatiana discussed her cultural background; however, if a particular text had dealt with her culture, I am certain that she would have gladly contributed to the dialogue. Todd and Kenton, on the other hand, were reticent to talk about their cultural experiences. They appeared to need time before they talked about themselves, as in the excerpt below. The children had been reading a book about planning birthday parties, and Wynn had asked the students to tell about a really good party that they had enjoyed.

Angela:	I liked the best party I went to when I went to my cousin's birthday party and we went to the movies, and we got cake and stuff.
Wynn:	At the movies?
Angela:	Yeah, we were in this room and we had cake and stuff.
Wynn:	That's a good idea, because you can have it right there. Kenton?
Kenton:	Um-m-m-m (pause)
Wynn :	Do you celebrate Chinese New Year's ?
Kenton:	Yep.
Wynn:	Is that a nice celebration to have?
Kenton:	Yeah.
Wynn:	Do you celebrate it too, Todd?
Todd:	Yeah.
Wynn:	Do you like that celebration?
Todd:	Yeah.
Wynn:	What about you, Cam?
Cam:	Um...when I celebrate um...what is it? Halloween dinner or...what is it...Thanksgiving, we make paska, and each year we make paska. [Paska is a Ukrainian Easter bread.]
Wynn:	Oh, the Easter bread...

The discussion continued about food eaten at parties when suddenly Kenton said, "For Chinese New Year's there's usually a roasted pig or pork and stuff." Wynn immediately noticed the contribution, and responded, "Oh...pork? You have pork." Kenton nodded

and the conversation stopped there. Despite the boys' unelaborated responses, Wynn's question seemed to get Kenton thinking about his cultural holiday. Whether Kenton needed to feel safe before contributing, or whether he needed to hear the responses of others is difficult to determine. The excerpt also illustrates the difference in depth of response that Angela and Cam gave, perhaps due to a familiarity with birthday parties, or to their strong social positioning within the group.

Todd did not share any cultural experiences over the course of the study, whereas there were two instances when Kenton shared personal experiences that revealed his cultural heritage. The first instance is reported in chapter 5 when Kenton revealed his background knowledge of rice paddies. In the excerpt below, the students had been talking about email, and Kenton shared the following, without prompting:

Kenton:	People used to ride on bikes and then they get the mail.
Todd:	Yeah...(unclear)...throw the mail? (Students talk at once.)
Wynn:	(unclear)...and to get mail also because this is how we use email, right?
Kenton:	Because my dad used to be a mailman working for China, and he used to ride a bike to travel.
Wynn:	We can write a letter and we can have a person deliver it, but we can also use email, if a person we're writing to has a computer, right?

Wynn kept the conversation on track by staying with the subject of mail, either email or delivered mail. Educators walk a fine balance between staying on task or detouring to students' choice of topic; however, this example illustrates a lost opportunity to draw upon Kenton's funds of knowledge. Kenton's contribution was on topic and was also a window into his cultural self that could have been capitalized upon. Wynn was likely unaware of the value of his personal comment, whereas I was attuned to instances when cultural background was shared because of my studies.

The discussion sometimes revealed subtle differences in cultural understandings of the ELL students. One day, the children were talking about stories they knew with

mermaids and the talk moved to movies with mermaids. The native English speaking children in the group were able to contribute substantially to the conversation about various versions of the movie *Peter Pan,* some of which had mermaids; whereas, Kenton and Todd looked from teacher to peer, and listened quietly to the talk around them. Perhaps watching Disney rental movies was not a common occurrence in their homes and so they could not contribute to the group discussion. On another occasion, Wynn had asked the students what Canada is famous for, and the variant responses reveal much about each child's cultural stance:

Wynn:	What is Canada famous for? Samantha? (pause) A number of things, not just one.
Sam:	Hockey.
Wynn:	Hockey is one. What other things is Canada famous for? Kenton?
Kenton:	English.
Wynn:	How do you mean, English?
Kenton:	Like, lots of people speak English in Canada.
Wynn:	Lots of people speak English. Is that something we're famous for? [other students chime in]: no, no.
Wynn:	Lots of people speak English all over the world. Todd?
Todd:	Because we're lucky that we have machines and electricity.
Wynn:	(pause) Machines and electricity are all over the world too, even in Bali. Does that make us famous for having those things? So, why are we famous for hockey?
Kenton:	We're lucky to have money. Some people don't have enough money.
Wynn:	Money? We have a lot of money?
Kenton:	uh-h-h-h
Wynn:	Does that make you famous? As a country? Maybe as a person if you've got billions of dollars, you might be famous. Can't think of

anything else? OK. I was thinking of...you know those um ... policemen that have red coats and ride horses...?

Sam: Yeah.

Wynn: The RCMP? The Royal Canadian Mounted Police? They're only in Canada. Have you ever seen a Mountie, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police?

Todd: No.

Cam: I've actually had one talk to me.

Todd and Kenton's responses reflected what one might expect from families who have immigrated to Canada, and who probably have had conversations at home about the benefits of living here: a good lifestyle with machines, electricity and money, and where the people speak English. Todd had not heard of the RCMP; whereas, Cam was bursting to tell of his experience with an RCMP officer. Todd and Kenton revealed their experience of Canada and how it is famous *for them*. They brought their personal histories and ways of being in the world to the table, and their responses were at odds with the teacher's expectation of student experience and background knowledge. Gonzales and Moll (2002) point out that if one accepts that people have knowledge acquired through their life experiences, then one must ask why some people's knowledge is considered more valid than others. In the above transcript, only particular knowledge mattered.

To conclude, the excerpts reported in this chapter illustrate how learning is a social process that is bound up within larger contextual, historical, political, and ideological frameworks that impact students' lives. Important cultural understandings vary from student to student, and are often embedded in language. The three focal children were at different ontological places: Kenton and Todd were in the process of finding their sense of self in the social context of the reading group, whereas Tatiana seems to be sure of herself and her identity.

CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Introduction

> Through analysis we are not on the trail of singular truths, nor of overly neat stories. We are on the trail of thematic threads, meaningful events, and powerful factors that allow us entry into the multiple realities and dynamic processes that constitute the everyday drama of language use in educational sites. (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 111)

I am no longer present in Wynn's Grade 3 classroom, but as I re-read the transcripts and replay the tapes, I am whisked back, replaying scenes in my mind. I can hear the children and adult voices, with their inflections, emphasis and intonation. I have tried to capture for the reader the complexity of the discourse in this particular classroom, in these particular reading groups, by quoting transcripts so that language routines could be observed, but also to illuminate the very different student personalities and how they interacted with one another and the adult. I have included thick description so that readers can have a sense of being there.

My research began with the question: "How do ELL students use oral language to shape and extend their construction of meaning while participating in reading activities in a primary classroom?" Related questions included: How do children construct understandings through their use of oral language with the teacher and with each other? What contexts support ELL students' construction of meaning in print texts? My initial understanding was that oral language would support meaning-making; however, I was unprepared for the complexity of classroom discourse, even though I had read that this was so (Cazden, 2001). I had to interpret not only what I heard, but the unspoken messages that I saw as I observed the exchanges in the guided reading events. I then had to somehow put the messiness of classroom talk into an analytic order. I chose to use Cummins' (2001) framework because it provided a way to categorize my findings and the language to name the processes that appeared to support ELL students in their construction of meaning. Although my data did not fit neatly into the categories of a

focus on meaning, a focus on language, and a focus on use, there were definite parallels. The teacher-student interactions are at the heart of his framework, and I, too, found that these interactions are where students' cultural, linguistic, and personal identities must be affirmed.

Classroom talk does not easily fit into categories. There were many instances of overlap, "there are often competing stories for the same happening ..." (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 111). The questioning chapter, for example, contains excerpts that could have been used to illustrate teacher-student interactions. I have constructed an interpretation based on my experience, observations, perceptions, social positioning, and knowledge, whereas other researchers may have noticed different themes and categories. At some point I had to decide when to stop analyzing. That occurred when I began to see repetition in the examples, and when I saw particular categories appear in different ways and in different contexts.

I began this research with a particular theoretical framework in mind: a sociocultural view of teaching and learning. As I analyzed and interpreted the data, I realized that my question involved more than a study of the role of oral language in meaning construction for English language learners. I also needed to take a critical look at the practice of guided reading from a sociocultural perspective. Before I discuss the main themes that emerged from this study, I begin with a critical analysis of guided reading.

An Epistemological Look at Guided Reading

A sociocultural account of learning rests on particular epistemological and ontological assumptions; namely that learners actively construct their own knowledge as they interact with others in their environment. The cognitive and social are interrelated; the learner must also understand the acceptable behavior and discourse of the social group. Epistemology is the "study of what can be counted as knowledge, where knowledge is located, and how knowledge increases" (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 36). An examination of the epistemological underpinnings of the practice of guided

reading brings to light assumptions about how children learn, and specifically, how they become readers. Reading itself is a way of knowing (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996); therefore, a deeper understanding of the epistemology of guided reading can benefit the reading field as a whole. Three questions should be asked to uncover the epistemology of guided reading: What is knowledge? Where is knowledge located? and How is knowledge attained? (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996). I begin with a brief review of guided reading, and then answer these three questions in relation to guided reading with the purpose of critically analyzing accepted assumptions that perhaps go unquestioned.

Guided reading is meant to provide a socially-supported setting whereby students are able to develop reading strategies as they progress through texts of increasing difficulty (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Children who are at approximately the same reading level are placed in small homogeneous groups to read teacher-selected texts. The teacher provides the support necessary to read the text, often by teaching specific reading strategies or by leading discussion and questions about the text. The space between what the student can read alone and what the student can read with assistance represents Vygotsky's (1934/1986) zone of proximal development. Learning occurs when an adult, or more knowledgeable other, helps a child to reach higher mental functions through mediated support, or scaffolding. The teacher may discuss what the book will be about, explain difficult words, concepts or text structure, activate or build on background knowledge, or break the text into manageable parts to provide the scaffolds required for students to read the text successfully. There is also individual attention built into the guided reading time. While children read to themselves, the teacher reads with one student and provides support based on what the teacher determines the student needs. I now discuss guided reading in light of the three epistemological questions mentioned earlier. I discuss the questions separately, but there is considerable overlap.

What is Knowledge?

Before one can answer the first question, what is knowledge, a definition of knowledge is required. Wells (1998), in writing his reflections on knowledge and

knowing, makes the point that the word "knowledge" is used freely to refer to many different things, "specific facts as well as complex theories, and actions that we are able to perform, as well as explanations we may give about how to carry them out and the principles upon which they are based" (p. 27). As a result, the term can be confusing with the accompanying notion among educators that there is a lot of knowledge "out there" to be learned in a very limited period of time. Cunningham and Fitzgerald (1996) note that "knowledge" takes on various connotations, "ranging from background knowledge, to procedural knowledge or how to do something, to knowledge of meaning" (p. 50). I agree with Wells' suggestion that "Our emphasis on knowledge puts the cart before the horse; what we should be concerned about is knowing and coming to know" (p. 28). In the past, Wells notes, coming to know involved participation in activity as one generation passed on knowledge to the next generation. In contrast, knowledge in today's world, and in schools especially, tends to be memorization of facts, or "knowledge for show" (Wells, 1998, p. 28). The belief tends to be that knowledge is contained in objects that can be read and memorized. Instead, Wells suggests, the focus should be in knowledge building.

What is knowledge in relation to reading? According to Rosenblatt (1989), whose transactional theory of reading reflects a view of knowledge that is constructivist in nature (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996), reading happens when many sources of knowledge interact, or transact. The reader pays attention to the symbols (print), and to the responses evoked by the symbols. There is a reciprocal relationship between the reader and the text, and the efferent-aesthetic continuum comes into play as the reader adopts a particular stance. In addition, an individual responds to the text within a particular social context. Meaning is constructed from the symbols on the page but primarily from the reader's background knowledge and experiences. In answer to the question "what is most important to teach?" Cunningham and Fitzgerald suggest that, from a transactional view, teachers help students to adopt an appropriate stance, and to understand the importance of responding to the "images, feelings, and associations the print may evoke for them" (p. 56). "In short, the knowledge about reading that counts

most is knowledge used to select a stance and to respond to symbols evoked by the print, knowledge that is predominately situation specific" (p. 56).

In the guided reading events observed in this particular study, what constituted knowledge was revealed in the kinds of questions that were asked. The IRE pattern of interaction, when the teacher asked questions to which she knew the answer, placed the teacher in a position of knowing. For example, "What does this legend explain?" and "How did he (the character) feel about that?" reflect the teacher's questions about the text, and students were required to supply information that she already had. In other instances, questions were posed at the back of the students' books which again reflected someone else's perspective of what was important to know. A question posed by the authors read, "How did the title and cover photo help you predict what kinds of information you would learn about coins?" This question was likely meant to teach the reading strategies of inference and prediction, but it had very little relevance to these students with the result that they had difficulty answering it. This question suggests that knowledge of reading strategies is important knowledge to teach, or "procedural knowledge" (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 50). Other questions that were posed related to the content of the book implying that "knowledge of meaning" (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 50) is important to know. At other times, the purpose of asking closed questions was valuable in that the teacher was able to check student understanding, or review academic vocabulary that the students had previously encountered. The limitation of closed questions, however, is that they often lead to an efferent response, and if posed by the teacher or text, invite responses that are not student initiated.

The IRE sequence establishes the teacher as the one in control and authority in the guided reading group (Toohey, 2000). She knows the answers to the questions, and she nominates who will give the answer. Although this pattern of interaction helps the teacher maintain control, it affects the social positioning of the students depending on whether or not they are able to display their knowledge. The IRE sequence also requires a particular rhythm in order to function; the teacher asks a question, and the student is expected to

respond within a few seconds in order to keep the exchange going. A student's performance can be viewed as flawed if answers are not given in the appropriate amount of time. Such interaction patterns are not conducive to ELL student participation because they may not allow them the time needed to produce an answer.

In contrast, when the teacher adopts a transactional view of reading, she helps students to adopt an appropriate stance and to understand the importance of responding to the "images, feelings, and associations the print may evoke for them" (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 56). The students were engaged with the book *Miss Geneva's Lantern* (Lake, 1996) and the pattern of interaction changed. Kenton posed the question, "But isn't she going to be sad or something?" which started the negotiation of meaning about widow women and witches. The teacher stepped out of her management role and became an equal participant in the conversation. Kenton had responded aesthetically to the story; he asked a question that was important to him, and the students in the group had a "real" conversation. A transactional view of reading was realized and as a consequence, the students created their divergent meanings. When students ask their own questions about the text, or when questions are asked that invite a personal response (such as, "What did you think of the ending? or "Has something like this ever happened to you?"), then students express what the print evoked for them and the group participates in the knowledge-building to which Wells (1998) refers.

Where is Knowledge Located?

In the transactional theory of reading, knowledge is located in the reciprocal relationship between the reader and the text and not located in either the text, or the reader individually (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996). As with the discussion of "what is knowledge," the questions asked in the guided reading groups also reveal where knowledge is located. The teacher holds the knowledge when she asks a question to which she knows the answer. In this particular study, the students themselves believed that the teacher held the knowledge. For example, in response to one of Irene's questions, Darren remarked, "Why don't *you* tell us?" and Tatiana gasped, "I thought you knew!"

when Irene admitted to not knowing an answer. Kenton and Todd were not confident about their own knowledge evidenced by the inflection at the end of many of their answers to type-one and type-two questions. The boys were not predisposed to contribute their knowledge; they had become savvy about what was safe (van Enk et al., 2005). The exception was the book *Miss Geneva's Lantern* (Lake, 1996), when meanings were collaboratively constructed. In a constructivist view, "knowledge is located in the process or dynamic of knowing, within inquiry itself" (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 48). The knowledge was located in the social process of deriving meaning together.

The structure of guided reading, where the teacher selects the texts and the vocabulary to teach, also suggest that the teacher is the keeper of knowledge. The teacher chooses leveled texts with an appropriate level of difficulty based on her knowledge and judgment of student abilities. A view that values student knowledge might consider student interest and experience. In this study, the students were keenly interested in ghosts and witches; therefore, related books on this topic could be offered for further reading and discussion. In contrast, the books about United States coins and Bali were far removed from their experience and knowledge. When students have background knowledge about a topic before reading, they are better able to understand the text, and to participate in the ensuing discussion. This was particularly obvious in this study when Kenton and Todd were able to participate if they had background knowledge. Perhaps a book about China or Vietnam would have resonated with their cultural background and knowledge.

Lastly, it was clear that these students had internalized acceptable practices for participation and what it meant *to be* a student. They had come to understand the discourse of school, and that the teacher's questions had meaning in the context of school. The meaning of the question is quite often different than reality. For example, when the teacher asked, as she did in this study "Did you enjoy the story? Why or why not?" (a question commonly asked in classrooms) the ELL students answered from a school-based perspective, that is, answers commonly accepted in the context of school.

Kenton and Todd replied, "I liked the ideas of it" and "I never read a story about a mermaid before." Neither answer is satisfying because the boys have not truly engaged with the text and have not shared their feelings and associations evoked by the print. Cam, on the other hand, responded by reading aloud a passage that resonated with him; he was able to adopt an aesthetic stance to the text. The students responded very differently to the same teacher question. Cam may not have yet internalized the rules of participation, or he may be a student who chooses to overlook the expectations of school-based discourse. Packer and Goicoechea (2000) refer to this manner of relating to the world as the "costs of schooling" as children separate "mind and body, reason and emotion, and thought and action" (p. 236).

How is Knowledge Attained?

I have interpreted this question in the context of guided reading to mean how children become literate and what counts as literacy. In the social constructivist view, knowledge is attained through interaction with others. Vygotsky's (1934/1986) theory emphasizes the value of social interaction to enable children to move to higher mental processes. What happens on the social or interpersonal plane gradually is internalized to the intrapersonal plane, and speech is then used internally as the mediator of one's own thinking. "Knowledge building takes place between people doing things together, and at least part of this doing involves dialogue" (Wells, 1998, p. 29).

In this study, there was interaction with others as the teacher led discussion of the text. As mentioned above, the nature of the questions asked either stilted, or contributed to, collaborative knowledge-building. Tatiana was a verbal participant in her group; actively knowledge-building with her teacher and peers. Kenton and Todd were quiet participants at the beginning of the study but they listened to the teacher's explanations and to what their peers had to say. Whether the teacher and students were discussing new vocabulary, building on background knowledge, negotiating meaning, or answering questions, the social interaction that took place served to construct meaning, and confirm understandings for these focal children. For example, it was through discussion that the

boys better understood the practice of bowling, realized that "passed on" meant that the character in the story had died, and discerned a richer and deeper meaning of a legend from Ireland.

As the study progressed, Todd and Kenton became more active participants in their guided reading group. Todd repeated what those around him said and attempted to answer some questions; Kenton asked questions and offered his opinions. Upon reflection, I realized that the boys may not have been *verbal* participants at first, but they were internalizing the talk around them to eventually contribute socially. "Knowers construct knowledge and are constructed by knowledge" (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 48). The boys were growing and changing as they participated in the reading group. ELL students have a dual task of learning the language and developing their literacy. The dialogue that took place in the group near the end of the study encouraged critical thinking, an important component of what it means to be literate (Knobel, 1999), and the opportunities to use language to communicate served to develop their language proficiency. Meaning making is acquired through language for every learner, but especially English language learners.

Another indicator of knowledge attainment in the guided reading context was progression through the levels of books. Books are categorized based on difficulty from A-S (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), with "A" books being the simplest, and "S" books the most advanced. As students become better readers, they move to the next level of books. In addition, the texts in a guided reading program are generally brightly-coloured books including both narrative and expository text which are written by authors for children. The use of relevant, interesting texts is to enable students to go beyond their lived experience to new worlds and situations, which in turn can encourage response at a personal level. However, there is the danger that these books can be studied as if they are a basal series; for example, when comprehension questions are posed at the back of the book or the teacher asks literal, comprehension questions. An aesthetic stance occurs when students have a "lived through" experience with a text, and are invited to ask their own questions.

I observed that the teacher moved the students to the next level after most of the books at that level had been read and discussed. Knowledge is attained, then, as students progress to the next level, and this appeared to be an indicator of reading ability. If, for example, a student is reading at a level "N," he or she is considered to be a better reader than a student reading at a level "K." A more reflective stance might be to ask if students are effectively engaging with the text, or are they simply able to word-call. Some of the transcripts reported in this study show that the ELL students were unable to respond to, or discuss a text. Todd, in particular, had difficulty expressing his thoughts and opinions. Wells (1998) notes that in order to understand a text, "one must not only interpret the information it presents, but also engage with it responsively" (p. 29). He adds that this can be done either in dialogue with others, or in a dialogue with self. I admit that I do not know if Todd was engaging with texts through inner dialogue; he may well have been. However, as an observer I sensed his uncertainty, and would want to see him participating in collaborative knowledge-building. A student's ability to participate affects his/her literacy and language development.

To conclude, my epistemological analysis of guided reading indicates that, for the most part, the teacher decides what knowledge is, and is the keeper of that knowledge. Knowledge is attained as children learn reading strategies, and progress through the levels of books. Guided reading has the potential to embrace a sociocultural view of learning by incorporating changes to its structure. I will discuss these in the implications section of this chapter. I move now to the main themes that emerged as a result of this study.

Constructing Assertions

As I reflected about the study to write this chapter, I asked myself how my study added to what I already knew and had read about English language learners, and how the data analysis could contribute to the field of education and further research with English language learners. What made this study unique, and yet had implications for other situations and contexts? What were the most important ideas that stood out in this

particular classroom, with these particular children? My goal was to "move from past-tense assertions about what *happened* to present-tense assertions about what *happens*" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 115). The word "conclusion" implies final, so I aimed to "construct propositional assertions" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 115) that situated my analytic work in larger professional and scholarly discussions about ELL students, talk, and literacy. I needed to move from the particulars of this case to an assertion about the phenomenon itself. This case can be compared to the particulars of other situations. "In this way, 'truths' or assumptions can be extended, modified, or complicated." (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 116). In this case, I am generalizing about contexts that support meaning making for ELL students, not about what did or did not happen in the focal children's reading groups. The categories that emerged from these two reading groups would be realized differently in other reading groups, and in other contexts, just as they were different even among these two groups. Wynn, Irene and the children themselves interacted and responded in vastly different ways. Despite the variant ways of interacting, there are clear assertions that can be made about reading events and ELL students, with subsequent implications for practice. I now pull the threads together to answer my question of how English language learners use oral language to shape and extend their construction of meaning while participating in reading activities in a primary classroom.

Assertion 1: Talk is critically important for the language and literacy growth of English language learners. My findings confirmed the essential and fundamental role of talk in sharing knowledge and constructing understandings. For ELL students, the talk around texts has another dimension; it helps them to develop academic language, or CALP. Academic language requires a command of the oral register of schooling, and the ability to manipulate language to discuss abstract concepts. When contexts are created whereby ELL students can use language to express themselves, they are honing their language skills by using language for academic purposes.

Tatiana's verbalizations and sometimes awkward contributions illustrate the struggle to communicate coherently with academic language, but she was actively practicing her language skills. Kenton and Todd, however, contributed one-word

answers, or were silent at the beginning of the study. Vygotsky (1934/1986) proposed that children move from external dialogue to internal language; therefore, the boys may have needed to be immersed in social interaction before they were able to participate. The implication for teachers is that "quiet" ELL students may need time to internalize the language around them before they are able to respond. Todd and Kenton are prime examples of ELL students who may "fall through the cracks" because they were proficient speakers of social English but still needed support to attain academic language. Canadian-born ELL students who are not literate in their first language are particularly vulnerable to school failure because they do not have the language resources to draw upon when learning a second language (Roessingh, 2005). Todd and Kenton revealed to me that they understood their first language, but seldom spoke it at home. "While these children sound good, they are unable to do the 'cognitive pushups' in either language" (Roessingh, 2005, p. 4). For this reason, it becomes imperative that measures be taken to develop the academic language proficiency of Canadian-born ELL students.

Classroom talk plays the dual role of literacy development and language development for ELL students, but my view of oral language has shifted and broadened as a result of this study. When I began analyzing my data, I looked for instances that contributed to the language growth and development of CALP for these ELL students. However, classroom discourse is complex and language growth hinges upon a complex mix of social, cultural and historical factors. Student knowledge about the topic of conversation and the ability to participate affects their confidence and the resultant social positioning that occurs in the group. Todd and Kenton were unsure of themselves, giving answers they thought the teacher wanted to hear, or no answer at all. Students may give answers that are acceptable in the discourse of school, such as the responses to the question, "Did you enjoy the story? Why or why not?" Pat answers, such as "I liked the ideas of it." tend to be taken for granted and considered acceptable when, upon reflection, these answers do not indicate a true engagement with the text, nor do they stretch children's language skills. Contexts that invited an aesthetic response, such as the dialogue around *Miss Geneva's Lantern* (Lake, 1996), resulted in authentic language

where the boys appeared to forget what was acceptable or "right" in the reading group. Tatiana displayed the opposite scenario; a young girl confident in her abilities and willing to take risks with her contributions. Teachers need to move children beyond cursory answers to create opportunities for meaningful collaborative talk.

Educators need to be reminded of the importance of oral language in the classroom, and its use needs to be facilitated. Studies such as this reinforce the significance of oral language for the literacy learning of all students, not just ELL students. Collaborative talk, slowing down and changing the patterns of interaction, and inviting teachers and policy makers to participate in professional development will all contribute to a growing awareness of the importance of classroom discourse.

Assertion 2: When educators create contexts that encourage collaborative talk, both students and the teacher are recognized as holding knowledge. Students bring varied cultural, historical, and social knowledge to the guided reading event. When the teacher recognizes and values student knowledge, the tone of guided reading changes and there may be a shift from teacher-led to student-centered discussion. Student questions can be the source of discussion, or the teacher can pose open-ended questions. Students need to be given the freedom to pursue topics of their choice, and those topics may be of little importance to the teacher, such as the dialogue that occurred about spirit and ghost. The topic is not what is important, but the dialogue that happens around the topic. The teacher cannot know ahead of time what is going to be of interest to her students, and what they will want to talk about, but she must be open to allowing collaborative talk to happen. The guided reading structure must consider student choice and interests, rather than imposing these upon students.

Collaborative talk is also fostered when ELL students have background knowledge about a particular topic. In this study, Todd and Kenton were better able to participate when they had background knowledge or experiences about the text. When they lacked such knowledge, such as the excerpts about bowling, it became important to build that knowledge in a sensitive and kind manner. When the focal children had background knowledge, such as Kenton's knowledge of rice paddies, they were better

able to contribute to the discussion. As a result they were valued and active members of the group. When student knowledge and experience is recognized, then a positive teacher-student relationship is fostered which is so vital to ELL students' success at school. A respect for student knowledge affects the guided reading dynamic in numerous ways. Students' various background experiences will shape their response to text. This awareness helps teachers to make sense of the interpretations students offer. For example, Wynn asked the students what Canada is famous for, and the ELL students gave answers based on their cultural experience. The teacher expected certain answers, and there was an obvious disjuncture between the teacher's way of knowing (or the school's way of knowing) and the student's way of knowing. Only particular knowledge was considered correct.

ELL student knowledge may be unexpected and diverse, based on competencies and knowledge from their life experiences, termed funds of knowledge (Gonzales & Moll, 2002). For example, some families may be knowledgeable about cultivation of crops, weather patterns, business and trading practices or playing a musical instrument and when educators capitalize on student knowledge, all members of the class benefit. For example, Kenton had knowledge about rice paddies, which was shared briefly during a guided reading session. Teachers can tap into the funds of knowledge that parents and families possess and use this knowledge as a basis for instruction. This necessitates a determined effort to find out about students and their families, such as the kinds of literacy practices they engage in, what the talents and hobbies of family members are, and what topics the children and families enjoy discussing together. Students in Canadian classrooms today may speak six or seven different languages, and come from as many different ethnic backgrounds. It is unlikely that a teacher has knowledge of all these cultures and languages. The teacher can become knowledgeable about the students' funds of knowledge by talking informally with parents, and being aware of comments the ELL children make during class discussions as a window into their everyday lives. Once local culture and expertise is identified, family involvement can be fostered, for example, by inviting parents into the classroom to share personal experiences and knowledge. van Enk

et al. (2005) note that "…failing to capitalize on the competencies of children from 'marginalised' backgrounds and seeing only deficits with respect to privileged practices also effectively limits these students' opportunities for learning school literacy" (p. 504-505). Student learning is facilitated when teachers try to learn more about their students' home lives, and are sensitive to their various life experiences.

However, the curriculum does not explicitly suggest strategies nor give time allotments for such inclusion, and pre-service teachers may not be educated about addressing the needs of ELL students. When and how are teachers to incorporate language and culture into the school day? In the schools, who is well-versed as to the complexities of meeting the needs of diverse learners in our classrooms? I have been able to become knowledgeable about English language learners because of this research. Since collecting data for this dissertation, I have taught in a classroom with ELL students. The school day was crammed full, and I barely had time to address all aspects of the required curriculum. Sadly, I found that I, too, was neglectful about bringing the home language and culture into the classroom. I invited conversation about home languages, but there simply was not the time nor was there a school-wide initiative to incorporate student home lives into the school day.

The teacher-student relationship is important, but so is the child-book relationship. The students revealed an interest in spirits and ghosts, and such interest could be followed up by introducing related books on this topic. The practice of guided reading focuses on choosing leveled books rather than books that reflect student interest and experience. Teacher-librarians could offer the expertise and support needed to help teachers find related books which might be of interest to a particular student group.

Assertion 3: More time is needed during guided reading for collaborative knowledge-building. My research suggests that more time is needed in guided reading for students to collaboratively talk, to question, to pause and reflect, to dig deeper into the text, and to engage with self and others so that there can be collaborative knowledge-building. Too often, teachers feel the pressure of meeting curricular expectations and of "covering" a certain amount of material. There is the danger that student progression

through the levels of books is seen as an end in itself rather than student growth as critical, thoughtful readers. In this study, engagement with text and negotiation of meaning occurred when student dialogue was permitted to digress to topics of interest to the students, and when there was talk to better understand the text. Divergent talk takes time. The teacher can consider whether the questions asked during guided reading impart knowledge or collaboratively build knowledge. When the dialogue in guided reading is slowed down, then teacher-student interactions can move beyond the literal to the experiential, the personal and then also to the critical and creative (Cummins, 2001). There is a fine balance between the teacher knowing when to allow children to digress to topics of interest to them, and when to keep to the planned activity. The answer lies in one's beliefs about what it means to be a reader, and what it means to be literate. Is the goal is to progress to a particular level of book, or to truly engage with text?

There were excerpts that illustrated personal and experiential connections to the text, but few, if any, instances of critical or creative responses. The teacher may need to ask questions such as, "Do you think this character was believable?" or "Has something like this ever happened to you?" In the book *Bowled Over!* (Greenaway, 2002), the main character is bothered by the antics of a bully at school. The teacher could have asked, "Have you ever been bullied?" and then moved the children to critical and creative responses such as, "How can the problem of bullies be solved?" and carried the response further through letters to the principal, or a role play of bullying scenarios. The reading of one book could be up to four weeks or longer if students showed an interest in engaging with the book and related real-life issues. Creative responses could also occur after the guided reading time, in related writing, drama or art projects. The point is that guided reading could be structured so that students have opportunities to engage deeply with books.

One might also ask what it meant to the students in this study to be literate. Kenton and Todd appeared to enjoy reading. They read during the morning snack time, and welcomed new books introduced in guided reading with anticipation and excitement. They would likely say that they were readers, and I wish I had had the foresight to ask

them this question during the study. However, when I reflect upon the guided reading events, and the talk about books that occurred, they likely also thought that reading meant answering the teacher's questions. They tried hard to be a part of this discourse, even though they were often at a loss for words. Tatiana, in contrast, did not enjoy answering the teacher's questions and more than once mentioned that the guided reading time was "boring." I asked her what she would like to do instead of answering the questions at the back of the book, and after a few moments of thought, replied that she would like "to draw or something."

Time is also needed for students to participate in vocabulary-building activities. This entails student identification of words that are confusing to them, discussion of what particular words mean in particular contexts, and activities to explore the meanings of words so that new vocabulary is retained. My findings suggest that when words were introduced in a cursory manner, they were not retained, but that discussion about words helped the ELL students to construct meaning. Students need to participate and be actively engaged in word work to develop vocabulary. They need to relate the words to their personal experience, and make connections to other times and situations. The guided reading event does not give an expansive view of time; whereas, students need time to effectively construct meaning.

Assertion 4: The teacher has an important role to play as mediator of meaning. My study revealed that the teacher plays a crucial role in facilitating the acquisition of academic language. Vygotsky (1934/1986) asserts that a more knowledgeable other can help to develop higher mental functions through mediated support. He did not direct his comments to educators of diverse learners in particular, and yet this aspect of his learning theory is particularly relevant to those working with children learning another language. Mediation is critically important to make language and its uses explicit. Cummins (2001) advises that teachers explicitly point out to their students what language does, and how language works. The teacher becomes the mediator of this process; she can provide the direct, purposeful instruction that can make a difference for English language learners.

For example, Wynn explicitly explained how texts worked, built on background knowledge, and explained new vocabulary.

At other times, both Wynn and Irene used language as a scaffold to build on the construction of meaning for their students. The teacher must be able to listen, and to be attuned to students' intended meanings in order to provide the appropriate language and literacy scaffolds. The explicit instruction that takes place in the zone of proximal development can pull students forward in their language and literacy development. It is the teacher's task, as intentional mediator, to help students function in Quadrant D where language is abstract and the task is cognitively demanding. As mentioned in chapter 2, students should move from Quadrant A to B to D to acquire language and content successfully (Cummins, 2001), but that contextual and linguistic supports are needed to accomplish this. Roessingh (2005) suggests that ELL students can become "stuck" in Quadrant B where tasks are cognitively demanding, and contextually supported. This typically happens in the upper elementary grades, and as a consequence, ELL learners are unable to meet the academic demands of high school. The development of CALP, Rosseingh (2005) asserts, is dependent on mediation and support. The progression through the quadrants to develop academic language in guided reading may look as follows: the teacher and students talk about the text before reading and share what is known about the topic, (Quadrant A, context embedded and cognitively undemanding). The teacher then builds on background knowledge by providing necessary information, or shows pictures, discusses key vocabulary deemed necessary for comprehension, and perhaps asks students to predict what the text may be about (Quadrant B, context embedded and cognitively demanding). Lastly, the students read the text independently and write a response (Quadrant D, context reduced and cognitively demanding). The findings of my research indicate that the teacher's role is paramount in supporting the development of CALP, because she can provide the mediation necessary to make abstract language attainable for ELL students.

Assertion 5: The teacher should lead the guided reading group, if there is one. The staff at this school structured guided reading groups so that all students were able to

read with support every day. I learned this during an informal discussion with Wynn, and also learned that this was the purpose in having the teacher's aide lead a guided reading group. Teacher expertise is the factor that contributes the most to the achievement of students of diverse backgrounds (Au, 2000). Irene expressed a desire to take part in professional development pertaining to guided reading, as is consistent with Wasykowski's (2001) study of teacher's aides in classrooms. However, funding was not available to offer professional development for teacher aides in this school district. Allington (2007) devotes a chapter to the roles and responsibilities of professionals and paraprofessionals in schools in his recent book. He notes that teachers' aides are a relatively recent addition to schools, and were hired to help lighten the load for teachers by doing duties such as clerical work and attendance. The intent was to free up time for teachers so that they could better meet the needs of individual pupils. He adds, "However, in an odd turn of events, at least for struggling readers, many schools have come to rely on aides to replace the teacher and to function as tutors, albeit usually with some minimal supervision (p. 124)." The use of a teacher aide as leader of the guided reading group is unlikely to be of benefit to struggling readers.

There are many responsibilities that the teacher's aide can appropriately do to promote the literacy development of students. She can listen while students read aloud a known text, reshelve books, read to students, monitor students in the library, and distribute home reading books, for example (Allington, 2007). Those in leadership roles, in the school district where my study took place, do not advocate that an aide be responsible for reading groups, and in fact, caution against such practices. Allington notes that "neither the paraprofessional staff nor the classroom teachers have received adequate training in the most effective roles that paraprofessionals might play" (p. 125). Irene could have listened to students read, or done one of the jobs listed above, so that all students could have had the benefit of Wynn's expertise.

In summary, opportunities for collaborative talk are important for ELL students, but creating collaborative contexts is complex and takes time. The teacher must consider student knowledge and include student questions, as well as reflect on the kind of talk

that is encouraged. One must also be aware that knowledge is constructed against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices and language. One might argue that these instructional practices are effective for all children in a mainstream classroom; however, it is important to note that these practices may be of *critical* importance to the success of ELL students.

Implications for Research

This particular study was valuable because it provided insight into the complexity and transitory nature of classroom discourse. When talk is tape recorded and painstakingly listened to and analyzed, much is revealed about interaction patterns, student response, speaking turns, and amount of talk. There is a shortage of systematic classroom research. Studies such as this one address the individual and group dynamics and tensions in classrooms to illuminate the realities that exist. In addition, this research focused on the discourse in a primary classroom with ELL students. There have been many studies involving adults and older children who are learning English, but few studies have looked at the interactions of younger children (e.g. Toohey, 2000). More research in this age group, as well as longitudinal studies over the years of school would contribute to our knowledge of ELL students.

Teachers could undertake action research by tape recording interactions in the classroom to ascertain the patterns that exist. Children have an amazing ability to carry on purposeful discussion if given time to do so. Teachers could reframe the guided reading structure by spending additional time on discussion or word-work, and by allowing students to converse about texts with partners after the initial book had been introduced. Teachers could present alternatives to guided reading, such as literature circles, or other small group formats, to see what contexts encouraged collaborative talk. Often educators restrict the parameters for talk in the classroom by expecting too little from students, and take the leading role themselves with the result that valuable chances are lost to find out what purposes and possibilities students bring to the classroom.

My research suggests that the format of guided reading could be altered to accommodate the diverse language needs of students in Canadian classrooms. More research into teacher reflections on guided reading would further our understanding of reading events that build on the language and literacy skills of ELL students. What are teachers' views of guided reading? What are teachers' belief systems and how do these affect classroom practice? What are teachers' perspectives about what is effective, and ineffective for ELL students and their literacy and language development? Research into children's perspectives on guided reading would also be of value. How would children define guided reading? What does it mean to be a "reader"?

My research has focused on the development of academic vocabulary, and the importance of academic language proficiency for the success of ELL students in the school system. The question of how to develop academic language is still in need of more research. A targeted approach to vocabulary instruction with ELL students would be a worthy action research project, and would deepen our understanding of what it means to acquire academic language proficiency. Beck et al.'s (2002) tiers of words could be used to identify relevant vocabulary, and activities carried out to build depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge. Academic language proficiency also entails knowledge of how words are put together, and language that is socially appropriate. The action research could include a focus on how language is used in particular situations by having children pay attention to, and record language used socially.

Lastly, the suggestion that students will be successful at school if their cultural, linguistic and personal identities are affirmed (Cummins, 2001; Gee 1996) could be embraced by school staffs. An action research project could adopt and implement culturally sensitive practices, such as acknowledging students' funds of knowledge, inviting parents into the school to share their cultural knowledge, and incorporating culturally relevant texts into the curriculum. In this way, effective practices could be explored, and the cultural and linguistic capital that bilingual students bring to school will be valued.

Conclusion

The goal of research is to achieve a more informed and sophisticated understanding than that which was held at the outset. This study exemplified for me that language is a transaction that has the power to unite or separate people. Language is the means through which students and teachers communicate, meaning is negotiated, and collaboration is possible. This study also confirmed for me the very real and necessary need to value each ELL student's background and culture. When students are valued as individuals with unique cultures, languages and ways of being in the world, they are more likely to succeed in school. Canadians in general, I believe, tend to consider themselves multicultural and tolerant, but school systems have not generated policies that reflect these views in schools. For example, schools need to establish effective partnerships between themselves and the community they serve, and that means welcoming all cultural groups. This may mean learning new skills, or incorporating programs that send a message to all families that they are welcome and valued in the school.

The achievement of ELL students must be the responsibility of not just the classroom teacher, but the school and district as well. ELL students catch up to their English-speaking peers at individual rates, but we know that at least five years is needed to acquire the academic language of school. Therefore, instructional support should be provided over several school years. In addition, teachers need support and professional development in instructional strategies that are successful.

Educators face a complex and multifaceted task in providing a positive and successful school experience for English language learners. I am now in a position to help provide that school experience. I have been hired as a consultant with a local school board to develop programs and present workshops for teachers on English language learners. My research has helped me to have a solid foundation of knowledge about ELL students, and this job is an exciting opportunity for me to apply what I have learned from my research. I acknowledge that there are no easy answers, but I look forward to the challenge of making my research relevant in a positive way.

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Appendix A

Transcription Markers

The chart below indicates the transcription markers used in the dissertation. I attempted to capture the tone, gesture, silences, interruptions and inflection of what was spoken.

Pause, or voice trails off	…
Inflection	…?
Parenthesis ( )	makes note of gestures, sounds, eg (laughter) and when something spoken was unclear
Information noted	[ ]
Interruptions	---
Spoken at the same time	]
Emphatic stress	CAPS
Emphasis on one word	*italics*

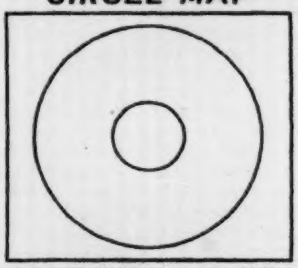
Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Where were you born?
2. Where were your parents born?
3. What language do you speak at home?
4. Tell me about your family (eg. brothers and sisters).
5. What are your favourite foods to eat?
6. What family traditions do you have?
7. What do you like about living in Canada?
8. Would you like to go visit (home country) some day?
9. If you had to go to school for only three days a week, what are some of the things that you would like to do with the extra time?
10. Have you ever done anything that other people were surprised that you could do?
11. Do you ever get other people to go along with your ideas or what you want to do? With friends? At home?
12. What is the best thing about being your age?
13. What's the hardest thing about being your age?
14. What would you like to be really good at doing?
15. If you could pick one thing that you wouldn't have to worry about anymore, what would it be?
16. How do you learn things in school?
17. What do you like best about school?
18. Who would you say are your friends?
19. Is there anything that you don't like about school?
20. When you're eating dinner with your family, what are some of the things that you might talk about?
21. Does your family tell stories?
22. What are your mom and dad good at doing? What do they do for their jobs?

Thinking Maps® Summary Page

CIRCLE MAP

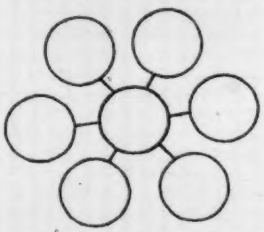


FOR DEFINING IN CONTEXT

TREE MAP

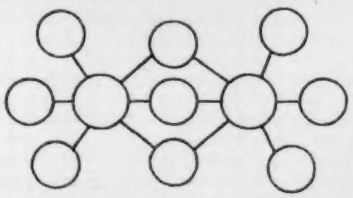
FOR CLASSIFYING AND GROUPING

BUBBLE MAP



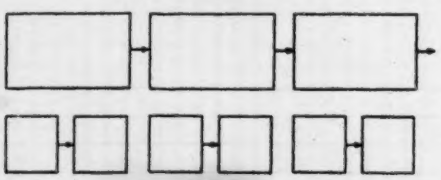
FOR DESCRIBING USING ADJECTIVES

DOUBLE BUBBLE MAP



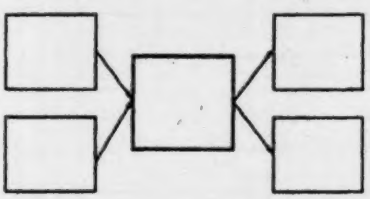
FOR COMPARING AND CONTRASTING

FLOW MAP



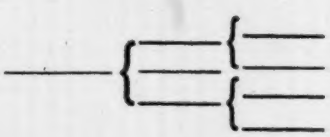
FOR SEQUENCING AND ORDERING

MULTI-FLOW MAP



FOR CAUSES AND EFFECTS

BRACE MAP



FOR ANALYZING WHOLE OBJECTS AND PARTS

BRIDGE MAP

FOR SEEING ANALOGIES